

**An Archdemon's
Dilemma: How to
Love Your Elf
Bride: Volume 7**

Fuminori Teshima

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AN ARCHDEMON'S DILEMMA: HOW TO LOVE YOUR ELF BRIDE

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A sharp slap rang out through the corridor, making Zagan's eyes shoot wide open. Chastille had slapped Barbatos right across the cheek full force.

“Ow...”

Perhaps having been pulled out of the shadows entirely by the force of her slap, Barbatos was now sitting on the floor in a complete daze, unaware of what had just happened





*"Oooh, a
kitty cat.
This is my
first time
pettin' a kitty
cat. What a
slender neck.
Should I snap
it? Should I
crush it? Aah,
it might be
even more fun
just to look at
it 'til it can't
breathe no
more too..."*

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Prologue

“Summer! The beach! Swimsuits! Today, the world is filled with LOVE POWEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEER!”

Zagan had no idea what Gremory was screaming about, but her voice was extremely annoying. His group was currently on a small, uninhabited island. It was just about large enough to snugly fit a town the size of Kianoides within it. The center of the island was filled with lush and exotic greenery not seen on the continent. The warm sun and cool sea breeze would surely make this a good island to develop. Even from a distance, the trees obviously had many fruits on them. It was the optimal place for a break, but...

“...Hang on, why are you here, Gremory? No, wait, before that, isn't it winter right now?”

The Archdemon Zagan could do naught but let out an astonished voice. Gremory was in high spirits, as if heaven was right before her. He didn't know where she had gotten it from, but the granny who had turned into a beautiful woman was wearing a glamorous black swimsuit. Even if he knew that she was Gremory on the inside, when she ran around like that... many things were swaying about, so he was deeply troubled.

Where's Kimaris? I want him to come drag this granny away already! Zagan reflexively prayed for his subordinate to come save him, and Nephy made a strained smile at his side.

“It seems Miss Gremory has had this swimsuit prepared for quite a while.”

As always, Nephy's hair was a beautiful snow white and her eyes were azure blue. Her pointy ears were quivering about in a somewhat amused manner and her reserved lips were faintly smiling. It definitely wasn't Zagan's imagination that her expression had softened up even more lately. She wasn't wearing her usual ultramarine one-piece dress today, but instead had on a pretty liberal swimsuit, which only covered her privates like underwear. She also had a pareo around her waist, giving her a mysteriously neat and tidy impression. The way she squirmed about from not being used to it was so adorable that Zagan couldn't take his eyes off her.

“I seriously thought I was going to die after slipping out of my teacher's surveillance, contacting Comrade Manuela, receiving these swimsuits, and fleeing all the way to Liucaon, you know?” Gremory

stated as she combed back her long hair and looked off into the distance.

“Why was there a need to do all that to come here...?”

“You say such odd things despite being my liege. This is a conference where races from all over the world gather. This may be my one and only opportunity to have so many varied maidens strike me down with their looks! Isn’t it obviously worth risking my life for!?”

The granny screamed with a ghastly expression, which distressed Zagan immensely.

If you keep risking your life over such crap, Kimaris’ body won’t hold out here... The one who usually served as Gremory’s brakes was the leonin Kimaris, but he was left with taking care of the castle while Zagan was absent.

And just then, Zagan suddenly noticed something. Nephy looked at her own chest, then Gremory’s, and let out a somewhat relieved sigh. Was it possible that she was worried about the size of her own breasts? It was true that Gremory’s young adult body had breasts that were larger than Nephy’s, but...

Huh? Why is she relieved when Gremory’s are larger? Zagan was taken aback by that.

It had been half a year since Zagan met Nephy. And up until that point, Nephy wasn’t being given proper meals at the elven village. When she began living with Zagan, the quality of her meals increased drastically. Though, Zagan’s eating habits were so miserable that she ended up being the one making meals. And so, it was possible that her body was growing even more.

I see... Nephy worries about it like that, huh? Zagan felt his face slackening up from discovering a new facet of Nephy.

“Hm? I just felt a strong burst of love power...” Gremory turned to look at them with a seriously creepy look.

Now if only this granny would keep quiet... And as Zagan scratched his head, another voice rang out.

“Huh? It’s Gremory. When did you come?”

The one who came rushing over with a bucket and shovel in hand like she couldn’t wait to get started was Zagan’s daughter, Foll. She was wearing a one-piece swimsuit decorated with a frilly skirt. Just half a month ago, she had a beautiful figure that rivaled Gremory’s, but she had since returned to her original form as a little girl.

“Mmm! Mmm! That’s a sly level of love power there! Thank you very much for sending me off to heaven!”

Even as Gremory collapsed onto the sandy beach, she used both her hands to form a window using the sand and set Foll down within it.

“My liege! I just thought up some amazing sorcery! What do you think of using something like a mirror as a medium to preserve the image of a scene for eternity! Aren’t I a genius?”

“Oh, if you’re looking to accomplish that, Master Zagan taught me a similar sorcery once,” Nephy said, clapping her hands together as she nostalgically recalled that.

Aah, now that I think of it, I did create a sorcery like that huh? Zagan also recalled that fact and nodded, leading Gremory to jump to her feet and close in on him.

“What!? Keeheehee, as one would expect of my liege. So you have already fully realized something that I could only think about just now? Then share your sweet memories with me!”

“...Unfortunately, it’s defective, since it was something I put together on the spot. After teaching Nephy, I never even used it once.”

“Huuuuuuuh!? WHY!? How wasteful! Have you never even thought of recording the rare expression that Lady Nephy is showing right now!? Or the way she suddenly shows such charming behavior!? If I were you, I would be invoking the sorcery nonstop and fill an entire wall... No, that’s not enough, the entire castle with such images you know?”

“S-Such shameless... No, mm. I get it.”

After thinking about it carefully, it did sound like a wonderful proposal. Well, filling the entire castle with them was out of the question, but Zagan’s sorcery used paper as a medium. It wouldn’t be such a bad idea to keep it all in something, like a book.

“Master Zagan, it’s troubling if you give it such serious thought.”

The tips of Nephy’s ears turned red as she bashfully protested.

“Hnnnng! So satisfying... Such a truly satisfying expression, Lady Nephy!”

Gremory then formed a window with her thumbs and index fingers and peeked through them as if to capture Nephy’s expression.

“...Hm? Now that I think of it, what kind of defect is there in the sorcery you made, my liege?”

“It’s sorcery that projects a scene that you think strongly about. But it seems it doesn’t project your thoughts on the surface, but one that you are truly conscious of deep within you. You can’t select the subject.”

“Huh? Then what did you project?”

This time, Nephy’s entire face turned red. And seeing this, Gremory crept up on her like a starving beast.

“Lady Nephy, tell me in detail. If it is I, such love power... no, I mean, I can carry that defect to its greatest extremes... I mean... I may be able to improve it!”

Zagan didn’t even feel like retorting as Gremory’s hidden

intentions easily leaked out. And before long, Nephy muttered out, completely beaten down by her persistence.

“...Um, no matter how many times I used it... the only thing that showed... was Master Zagan.”

“Hnnngh! Nice love power!” Gremory yelled as she pinned down her chest and squirmed around. Then, she said, “Keeheehee, I wonder just what sort of image of my liege was projected by you, Lady Nephy. I would have liked to see it.”

“Y-You can’t! It’s too embarrassing to show,” Nephy denied strongly, something unusual for her. However, precisely because of that, Gremory realized something.

“Huh? You still have it?”

“Uh, that’s, well...”

Zagan had told her to throw them away, but Nephy had kept several dozens of those projections of him with great care. And, as she explained that to them... a blood red burst bloomed in the air like a flower.

“Eek... Miss Gremory?”

“Zagan, Gremory did it again...” Foll muttered. The white beach was covered in blood. And lying down in a pool of her own blood, Gremory had an unbelievable smile plastered on her face.

“Ugh, to think I wouldn’t be able to catch it all... Such... love power...”

And, as the granny let out a sigh, Zagan thought back over what happened the previous morning.

Chapter I: We Were Out by the Ocean Anyway, so We Decided to Make Use of the Beach

“How are you feeling, Foll?” Zagan asked his bedridden daughter. She looked back at him with a discontented look in her amber eyes. Her squishy-soft hands were those of a girl no more than ten years old, and though the two horns that peeked out of her green hair belonged to the race of ancient and honorable dragons, as both a dragon and a human, the fact that she was young was quite obvious.

Sitting at her bedside, Zagan wore his usual robe with a crimson mantle as he brushed the girl’s head. His silver eyes gazed at his daughter and naturally swayed with a sense of kindness unbefitting of an Archdemon.

They were currently in the city of Atlastia, which existed at the bottom of the ocean that divided the continent and Liucaon. It was an underwater city, but thanks to the power of the sirens, they were able to breathe as though above water as well as walk across the ocean floor.

This land was now under Zagan’s rule, so they were able to borrow a private room for Foll. It seemed to be quite the fine room, and though they were in the ocean, the room was filled with air.

Although, we’ve now gone three weeks without even seeing the sun... Three weeks had passed since the incident where Zagan’s and Foll’s ages were swapped. And including the time that it took to resolve the incident, they had been down there for half a month.

Zagan completely regained his usual adult form, and Foll was able to return to the form of a small girl. They were able to dispel the curse that ate away at their bodies, but due to the excessive loss of mana at the time, Foll was still bedridden.

“I’m telling you I’m fine...” Foll claimed as she puffed out her cheeks while lying atop her bed. Her clothes were scattered about in disarray as she rested in bed, wearing pajamas rather than her usual native dress. Her green hair was properly tied up in braids, and she kept insisting that she could get up and go play at any time. Left with no other choice, Zagan bopped her head.

“Even if you think you’re fine, you’ve only recovered about half of your mana. It’s useless to tell me not to worry.”

“But I’m bored.”

“Hm... Well, there’s no helping that. I’ll read you a book later, so don’t pout like that.”

“Will you read me at least three of them?”

“Yeah, sure.”

Foll still looked discontent, but her mood seemed to have recovered.

But I guess this is about the limit in being able to deceive her... As the daughter of Wise Dragon Orobas, Foll’s mana was tremendous. That mana of hers wasn’t just simply expended, it was lost due to a curse. It wasn’t something that could be recovered just by resting, so she was recovering by being supplied with mana by the Heaven’s Scale Dragon Form that was charged with protecting the ocean city.

That was why they were unable to leave. The problem wasn’t the treatment, but the fact that at this rate, her recovery would still take another two weeks.

Foll was relatively docile, but it was unreasonable to ask a ten-year-old child to stay still and confine herself in a room for an entire month. There was a need for some sort of change of pace, immediately. And, as Zagan racked his brain over that, a small knock came from the door.

“Foll, are you awake?”

It was Nephy. When they came to the ocean city, Nephy was wearing an elegant dress, but now that they were forced to stay for a while, she wore her usual ultramarine one-piece dress with a pure white apron just like at Zagan’s castle. It also appeared that she was helping out with the chores at the temple because they were freeloaders.

Incidentally, Zagan tried to help out as well because he wanted to spend time with Nephy, but the citizens of Atlastia refused vehemently.

As Zagan looked over to Nephy’s face, his gaze was naturally drawn to her pink lips.

We kissed... huh...? Zagan was covered in blood. Not only that, he was tiny at the time. Plus, it was done for the purpose of creating a path for mana, so it wasn’t like it was truly romantic, but nevertheless, the feeling of her soft lips pressed against his was not a sensation that he would ever forget.

Perhaps having noticed his gaze, the tips of Nephy’s ears turned bright red and twitched about.

“S-So you were here as well, Master Zagan... Um, there is something that I’d like to... consult you about,” Nephy said, trying to maintain her composure despite being flustered.

Somehow, this is also refreshing... Zagan had often seen her

flustered when she was trying to make a request of him, but there weren't a lot of situations where she wanted to say something through her own embarrassment like this. However, Nephy was stealing glances over to Foll as she spoke.

What's this? Is it something she doesn't want Foll to hear? Nephy's troubled face was a favorite dish of his, but he didn't actually want to trouble her. So, Zagan bopped Foll's head one more time, then stood up and walked over to Nephy.

"What's wrong?"

"Um, lend me your ear..." Nephy urged him, and Zagan brought his ear closer to her.

I wonder what this is? She smells sweet despite being in the sea... This room and the area around it were filled with air, but they were still within the ocean. As such, it plainly smelled of ocean water all over. After spending several weeks here, his sense of smell had been practically numbed to this fact, but that sweet, flowery smell was something like an oasis in the desert, quenching his parched heart.

Nephy brought both her hands up to Zagan's ear, then whispered to him.

"In truth, Miss Lilith and the others suggested that we take a stroll on a nearby island to relax." A somewhat ticklish sensation sent a shiver down Zagan's spine. His face was loosening up from happiness with just that, but the meaning of what she was saying immediately got through to him.

"An island?"

"Yes. An uninhabited island. It is apparently quite lovely even during this season. Could we go up there together with Foll, I wonder?"

"I see," Zagan replied. He was thinking Foll required a change of pace, but it seemed Lilith also had that on her mind. She wasn't a sorcerer, but she was still quite a capable girl. However, it was possible that Zagan was jumping to an early conclusion, so he whispered back that he wanted to discuss the matter further.

"Is it close?"

"I wonder? It seems to be a distance that can be covered by ship in a short time."

"Hm... Well, at that distance the supply of mana from the Dragon Form should still reach. Foll is also quite bored, so I think it's a good idea."

And with that, Nephy's expression brightened up in a flash.

"Would it be alright to inform Foll immediately?"

After Zagan nodded, Nephy went over to Foll's bedside.

"Foll, do you want to go play on an island outside?"

"An island? Can I?"

“Yes. Master Zagan also said that it would be alright.”

Foll shifted her gaze over to Zagan as if she couldn't believe it, to which Zagan nodded in return.

“...So happy.”

Unable to bear it, Foll hugged Nephy.

“Oh my.”

And, while she brushed her head with a smile, Nephy hugged her back.



“From the looks of it, it'll be a good change of pace for her.”

Since they were going out, there was a need to make preparations. Well, Zagan was fine with just the clothes on his back, but that wasn't good enough for girls like Nephy and Foll. As such, Zagan left the room out of consideration for them and found a girl waiting for him there. Her red hair was tied up to the side of her head, and her scarlet eyes had a gentle look to them. She wasn't currently wearing her Anointed Armor, but was instead wearing a deep blue ceremonial dress with a Sacred Sword at her waist. She was Zagan's sworn ally and an Archangel of the Church, Chastille.

“What, you're still here?”

He was acting rather rude, but Chastille simply let out a single sigh and didn't lose her composure at all.

“...Good grief. You're the same as always.”

Seeing her calm reaction, Zagan realized that Chastille was in work mode. Chastille was an unparalleled crybaby in her private life, but she was quite talented otherwise. Both Zagan and Chastille had different reasons for being here, but they were allies. It seemed that she had come to ask him something that was on her mind.

“Has that conference or whatever gone on that long?”

Though they were guests, both an Archdemon and an Archangel had much they had to do. It had been about half a month since the two of them were able to meet face to face like this.

“No, there's no way we could keep the representatives of all the races here for that long. The conference itself has ended, but there are many duties for the church to carry out from sorting through the complaints and reports from each of the races to consulting with them in private. That's why I haven't been able to go back yet.”

“Isn't it fine to leave those affairs to civil officials?”

“Well, I'm being helped out by Kuroka and Richard... Nephteros too.”

In other words, she wasn't just running around doing all the work on her own. However, in that case, it seemed all the more practical for her to return to Kianoides...

So there are matters that she can't just leave to civil officials, then...
And what immediately came to mind regarding that...

"Are you looking into the incident involving Foll?"

As Zagan pointed that out, Chastille's eyes widened.

"...I see I can't hide anything from you, huh?" Chastille replied as she began fidgeting with her hair. Then she continued, "There are far too many inexplicable aspects to that incident. According to all of you, that person called Alshiera is the primary suspect, but she's completely vanished and we haven't been able to track her down. Even if she were the culprit, just what was her goal? Did she fail? Or did she accomplish it?"

The unpleasant vampire Alshiera. It seemed she was deeply involved with the root cause of Foll's rampage, but at the same time, she showed signs of helping Zagan's group deal with it. So, just what was she? Zagan himself wanted to quickly chase her down and finish her off, but...

Nephy seems to think she isn't an enemy... In that case, he had reservations about outright killing her, though that wasn't really the appropriate wording to use with a member of the Night Clan. In any case, since he was unable to meet with Alshiera directly, trying to gather information was as useless as trying to grasp a cloud. However, since there was a high probability she would meddle with Foll again, Zagan planned on cooperating with Chastille on this.

"Her character is completely unknown to us, after all. However, she mentioned a name that bothers me."

"Azazel...?"

Zagan nodded in return. It wasn't clear whether it really existed, but that was the name of the thirteenth Sacred Sword. At the very least, the church did not possess it. There was an organization in the church which shared the name, but that didn't necessarily point to evidence of Azazel's existence.

It really does seem to be something quite special though... It didn't seem like a Sacred Sword that the church had simply lost, anyway.

"She knows something about Azazel. If we pursue it, she'll surely show herself once more."

"That's... probably true. I'll leave that part to you."

"So you say, but I haven't found any leads yet."

The same likely applied to Chastille. She crossed her arms and let out a groan, then raised her voice as if suddenly remembering something.

"Oh yeah, there was something that I had to talk with you about. The investigation seems like it'll take a while, so the church is going to send over reinforcements."

"Hmm, so you're being relieved?"

“That would be nice... But they’re not my subordinates. Since we’re all the way out here, I don’t think there are many members of the Unification Faction that would get sent out. It might be better for you not to show your face.”

There were all sorts of people who were part of the church. Chastille was quite amicable, but her subordinate Kuroka was originally part of Azazel, the faction within the church that especially hated sorcerers. Moreover, the organization known as the church itself held sorcerers as enemies, and those within the church who were friendly to sorcerers were surely in the minority.

Nevertheless, Zagan simply shrugged his shoulders.

“This is already my domain. If they’re such idiots that they don’t understand what it means to offend me in this place, I don’t think they’ll live all that long either way.”

“People get reckless even when they’re afraid. Angelic Knights are people too. There’s not all that many people who can look an Archdemon in the eyes and stay calm here.”

“Hm...? Is that so? I feel like your subordinates are all relatively calm, though...”

Well, when Zagan intruded on the church because he had business with Chastille, they were afraid, but nevertheless, none of them lost themselves and attacked him due to that fear. Zagan even admired how scrupulous her subordinates’ training was.

And, as he tilted his head to the side, Chastille shook her head in astonishment.

“That’s because they’re stationed in Kianoides. Even if they don’t want to, they’ll spot you if they walk through town.”

Even without an enemy like Bifrons causing incidents in town, Zagan went to town once every three days to go shopping or to visit the Archdemon Palace. When he had first become an Archdemon, he did so intentionally as to establish his authority of the place, so his face was known even to children like Kuu who had nothing to do with sorcery.

“It’s true that I’ve never done anything cruel there, but is that enough to disperse things like fear and hostility?” Zagan asked. There was no purpose to scaring people meaninglessly, but it was also troubling if they looked down on him. If it was just Zagan, he didn’t really care. But if Zagan’s reputation was harmed, then Nephy, Foll, and his other subordinates would also be exposed to danger. It was perhaps better for him to arbitrarily show himself in public. And, as he worried about such things, Chastille scratched her head.

“No... If you show such a charming display with Nephy so often, or how you’re so indulgent with Foll all the time, there’s no way anybody would be afraid. It’s already a famous sight in Kianoides, you

know?"

"Wh-What...? No way... Impossible..."

Zagan was struck by a dizzy spell.

Charming...? Wait... is she saying that the townspeople were watching...? He understood that he conducted himself in a manner where he couldn't really properly take the lead with Nephy. Just inviting her on a date took an entire week of mulling about in confusion. By the time he invited her and went on the date, he didn't have any clothing prepared and ended up shrinking. All he ever did was show off his embarrassing side.

But that was something he allowed because it was fine for Nephy to see it. And yet, it wasn't only exposed to Chastille, but was even a famous sight in town. As Zagan was struck down by an unprecedented shock, Chastille realized her mistake and began panicking.

"Th-That's not it! I didn't mean to make fun of you! How do I put it? That in itself has a good influence on the surroundings, so it's actually a big help to me!"

Zagan's spirit was beaten down even further by being consoled by Chastille of all people, but he was still an Archdemon. He mustered his willpower and stood back up.

"H-Hmph... An Archdemon cares not for such trifles no matter what the masses think."

"Y-You're right."

Somehow, Chastille agreeing with him out of pity was bringing Zagan to tears.

"Hyahyahyaah. You're looking real shitty there Zagan. If you're more of a wreck than the crybaby, you've got nothing left to stand on."

A grating voice came from Chastille's feet. Or, more specifically, it was from the shadow at her feet. And, as Zagan's face spasmed with a twitch, Chastille scratched her head as if things were just getting more and more troublesome.

"Barbatos, why do you keep saying things like that when you know you're going to get punched?"

"He punches me without any reason at all on a regular basis. May as well get a few hits in at times like this."

And with that, the face of a sorcerer with scruffy looking hair came out of Chastille's shadow. Due to their location at the bottom of the sea, his unhealthy looking face with shadows under his eyes looked even gloomier than usual.

"Do you not think that's exactly why you keep getting punched?"

"The hell? You're taking Zagan's side even though he makes fun of you all the time?"

"I do believe you're the one who calls me a crybaby the most!"

Even Chastille had a vein popping on her brow, to which Barbatos cocked his head to the side curiously.

“Huh? Crybaby isn’t an insult, right?”

“I know it’s inevitable that common sense doesn’t apply to sorcerers, but that’s really too farfetched.”

“Huh? If we took the crybaby part away from you, you’d just be some boring ass female knight. Like hell I’d keep you company if you weren’t even a crybaby.”

“Huh?”

“Huh?”

Barbatos finally realized what it was he had just said. And, after sinking into silence, his face turned both red and white as he began shaking.

I’m surprised you can insult anyone like that... Zagan also thought of Chastille as a crybaby, but since she was Nephy’s good friend, he never said it aloud. Barbatos then began panicking as he waved both his hands in front of him and tried to gloss it over.

“W-Wait! You’re wrong! This is that. Um, when you’re a crybaby you’re weaker than me, so I’ll protect you! Or, um, I’m kinda better than you like that, so that’s why—”

A sharp slap rang out through the corridor, making Zagan’s eyes shoot wide open. Chastille had slapped Barbatos right across the cheek full force.

“Ow...”

Perhaps having been pulled out of the shadows entirely by the force of her slap, Barbatos was now sitting on the floor in a complete daze, unaware of what had just happened. It seemed his behavior just now had crossed the line even for Chastille. Calling her a crybaby was par for the course, but this was the first time she had clearly shown how it angered her.

Wouldn’t it have been fine if he’d just said being a crybaby was one of her charms? Why did it end up so complicated? Well, Zagan wasn’t really one to criticize others when it came to honestly saying what was on his mind. Incidentally, Chastille was making a surprised expression on a level with the one who had just been slapped. It was as if she had just been struck herself.

Is this what they mean when they say two people are close enough to fight...? Or maybe she was just getting angry to hide her embarrassment?

Despite appearances, Chastille was quite the realist. She understood that there was a light and dark side to the church... Well, she was also an awkward girl who couldn’t forsake anyone despite knowing of that clear divide. In any case, she wasn’t supposed to be one to lash out like this. Chastille held down the hand she used to hit Barbatos, then spoke out in a trembling voice.

"I didn't mean to... But you should stop looking down on others like that."

Unable to bear her bewilderment any longer, Chastille left the two of them behind. And, unable to understand just what had happened, Barbatos rubbed his cheek as he opened his mouth. It was like his soul had departed him.

"...Ow."

And he repeated the same thing as before, to which Zagan nodded in exasperation.

"Well, you did get hit."

"It hurt... way more than when you punch me. Why's that?"

This man received punches from Zagan's fist that could sunder bedrock as if it were an everyday thing. Compared to that, Chastille's open palm slap should have been like a mosquito bite, but Barbatos was left extremely shocked.

Unable to bear the sight of his undesirable friend sinking into this watery grave at the bottom of the sea, Zagan scratched his head.

"Ummm... That reminds me. Seems there's an uninhabited island nearby, Barbatos. I'm taking Foll there for a change of pace, so go call that lot from the church. All of them should be getting fed up with being at the bottom of the sea by now too."

Barbatos raised his head, still looking like a dead fish.

"An island...? Why go there?"

"You may not know this, but when you anger another, you need to apologize. And when you apologize, it's more efficient for them to be in a good mood."

"A-Apologize? Why do I have to..."

"Do you really not know why Chastille was angry just now?"

"You saying it was my fault!?" Barbatos snapped at Zagan out of reflex, but even he himself understood this, and sunk back down to his knees completely crestfallen.

"...Apologize? Me? Listen, I've never apologized to anyone in my life... so what're you telling me to do here...?"

Zagan never thought Barbatos would brood over it so seriously and was completely taken aback. He then tried to give his undesirable friend a good smack on the back.

"Well, good for you. It'll be a fresh experience. Expanding one's field of view is directly connected to elevating one's view as a sorcerer."

"Quit messing around, Zagan. Have you ever apologized to anyone?"

"Huh? Ummm, I have... probably."

Like when he once cast Nephy aside and ended up hurting her.

Huh? Did I even properly apologize that time? He felt like he was in

a complete haze at the time from Nephy returning to his side, so he did not remember. Both Zagan and Barbatos let out an involuntary sigh. They really were birds of a feather.

“A-Anyway, you were in the wrong. If you don’t properly apologize, it’ll be too awkward to even look her in the face.”

“What do you even know about us!? Crybaby is a compliment here!”

Mm. I’m not as bad as this guy, so I’m okay... Having revised his perception of himself, Zagan squatted down next to Barbatos.

“I don’t think that’s why she was angry. Do you remember ever seeing Chastille get truly angry from just being called a crybaby?”

“N-Never. So, what was that all about?”

And just as Zagan was about to answer his helpless, undesirable friend...

“Master Zagan.”

He suddenly heard Nephy’s voice behind him.

“Nephy? Were you watching?”

“...Yes. My apologies. But... just a little.”

As she beckoned him over, Zagan brought his face close over to Nephy’s.

“Master Zagan, if you tell him the reason Chastille is angry, it will have the opposite effect.”

“Why?”

“I mean, um... I think even Chastille believes that she went too far and is regretting it. So, if Lord Barbatos were to go apologize to her because you told him to, don’t you think it would just anger her further?”

“Hmm... is that how it works?”

In truth, Zagan didn’t truly understand, but if Nephy believed it, then it must have been true. And having been convinced, he suddenly remembered something.

“Nephy.”

“Yes, what is it?”

“Have I... ever angered you?”

Nephy’s pointy ears quivered at the question, as she then smiled in a happy manner.

“Hmmm, I wonder about that...”

“Huh, wait, Nephy?”

And leaving the bewildered Zagan as he was, Nephy turned around with a laugh.

“I will go speak to Chastille. Lord Barbatos, I will be secretly cheering you on, so please do your best.”

With that, Nephy left the two of them behind.

“...Hey. Hasn’t your elf’s personality changed somewhat?”

“Ummm... Mm. Well, I wonder?”

What do I do? This was supposed to be a good breather for Foll, but I feel like something's going to happen.

And just like that, Zagan's group holiday began with a turbulent atmosphere in the air.

Chapter II: An Uninhabited Island Means the Beach! Swimsuits! And...

“I-Impossible...”

A few days ago, in the castle of one of the thirteen Archdemons, Andrealphus, who was the oldest, and also considered the strongest, sorcerer among the Archdemons... was down on his knees coughing up blood. All around him was blood, blood, blood, along with masses of meat which couldn't even be recognized as animals or chimeras. Archdemon Andrealphus was among all that. And within that disastrous scene, there stood a single man all on his own.

“HEEHYAHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHAA! Is this an Archdemon!? The peak of all sorcerers!? The strongest existence!? He who rules over all!? Nay! Archdemons deserve no such fear!”

The man looked odd. Half of his face was covered with an eye patch, and he had bandages wrapped all over his body. The bandages were covered with intricate crests like some sort of seal. His exposed left eye was bloodshot with madness, and he basked in the joy of watching the Archdemon spurting out blood.

“Have you lost your mind, Decarabia? Revolting against me is... GHAAAA!?”

The sorcerer, Decarabia, casually kicked the already-vanquished Archdemon.

“You can cut that out already, great and almighty Archdemon,” he said. And, after scratching his ear in boredom, Decarabia let out a laugh and asked, “Ummm, how's it go? Erasing everything you've ever known, be it people, objects, or anything that would leave your name behind, erasing your very existence itself. Such is the retribution of an Archdemon... was it?”

Decarabia crushed the old Archdemon underfoot, then brought his face closer with a twisted smile.

“So whatcha gonna do to someone like me who's got nothin' but strength? You gonna trample on my strength? But if an Archdemon is here on the ground, grovelin' before me, who's gonna trample on my strength, huh? Come on! Tell me! I wanna hear the answer so much it's drivin' me nuts!”

Decarabia's left eye sparkled with a fiery blaze as he grabbed the Archdemon's right arm.

“Wh-What are you doing!? Sto...

STOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOGHYAAAH!?”

Decarabia ripped off the arm as if plucking a weed.

“Hmmm? So this here’s the Sigil of the Archdemon, huh? Do I get to keep it ‘cause I beat an almighty Archdemon? Will I get stronger if I use this?”

His eye sparkled like a child looking at a new toy, but that immediately clouded over.

“But, I don’t need it. I won’t prove I’m the strongest if I use this crap. I wouldn’t actually be stronger myself.”

Strangely enough, his train of thought was the same as the newly appointed Archdemon Zagan. What differed here was that Decarabia was hopelessly twisted.

“AAAAAAH! It’s not enough! Even after defeatin’ an Archdemon this achin’ won’t stop! The eye that guy gouged out is so painful and itchy that I’m gonna go mad!”

His eye patch seemed to be quite sturdy and Decarabia's nails began to tear from scratching against it. After apparently coming back to his senses, he lowered his gaze to the Archdemon on the verge of death.

“Oh yeah, great an’ almighty Archdemon. Another Archdemon died recently, right? Who’s the new guy? What’s he like? He stronger than you?”

And even while wheezing roughly, the Archdemon answered with trembling lips.

“Za...gan...”

The moment he heard that name, Decarabia's smile vanished.

“What... did you say?”

“Zagan... The new Archdemon’s name... is Zagan... Guaaah!”

The Archdemon was mumbling in a delirium as Decarabia crushed his head underfoot.

“Zagan...”

He repeated that name nostalgically, in an irritated manner, yet longingly.

“Zagan... Zagan... Zagan,

ZAGANZAGANZAGANZAGANZAGANZAGANZAGANZAGANZAGANZAGANZAGANZ
ZAGANZAGANZAGANZAGANZAGANZAGANZAGANZAGANZAGANZAGANZAGANZ
ZAGAAAAAAN!!!” Decarabia screamed to the heavens.

He screamed, and screamed, and suddenly went quiet. His expression calmed down just like a baby in his mother's bosom, and he then smiled just like a little boy.

“I see. So he became an Archdemon. How amazin’. That’s just like Zagan. He was a strong kid even before becomin’ a sorcerer, after all.”

Then, after smiling and praising his sibling, his eye peeled back repulsively.

“GYAAHAAHAAHAAHAAAA! I see! So he’s an Archdemon! That guy who gouged out my eye! Who crushed my arm! Who tore out my heart! He’s an Archdemon!”

And so, Decarabia began walking.

“I need to go see him. He’s the only one who can save me from this endless achin’ in my eye.”

With that, the Archdemon’s castle crumbled to pieces behind the lunatic.



“The beach... is so nice... If only I was born in this world...”

Zagan was greatly perplexed. After inviting Chastille and the others over to an uninhabited island, he found Gremory waiting for him there.

It was supposed to be the turning point of winter, where it would be impossible to even think of going for a swim, but oddly enough, the sunlight pouring down from the sky was just like summer. It seemed that this was thanks to the power of the sirens’ Holy Treasure. If one were to change the climate using sorcery, it would require a magic circle that covered the entire area of the sky over the island along with the power of several dozen sorcerers. This was a power different from sorcery and the Sacred Swords... No... it even differed in terms of how its power existed in itself. In any case, it was something awe-inspiring.

As for Gremory, who appeared on such a miraculous island, she was lying on the beach with a smile plastered on her face as she gazed at the other girls. Kuroka seemed to sense danger to her body, drew a short sword from her cane, and took a step forward.

Why is this idiot here? I only just decided on coming out here moments ago, right? Zagan had left Gremory with her teacher three weeks ago. So how did she end up coming today, with this kind of impeccable timing? Was this granny maybe prescient? And upon thinking that, he realized it was the opposite.

It took until today for her to escape from Orias... And because Gremory brought over swimsuits saying they should go to the beach, Lilith recommended that everyone go to this island. It may have also been possible that Lilith was guided along without directly meeting Gremory or anything too. This granny would surely go that far to fulfill her desires, leaving Zagan at his wits’ end.

Zagan was currently dressed in nothing but a swimsuit in the form of shorts. Normally, he had robes wrapped around him, covered in countless barriers, so it was somewhat unsettling for him.

Present at the beach were Zagan’s group of four consisting of himself, Nephys, Foll, and Gremory; six people from the church

including Chastille, Kuroka, Nephteros, and a young Angelic Knight named Richard; and the two people who had invited them here, Lilith and Selphy. In total, there were twelve of them, all wearing swimsuits prepared by Gremory. However, Barbatos was nowhere in sight. He was likely lurking in the shadows somewhere, but he wasn't showing his face.

"Um, Your Highness?" Lilith called out to him timidly. She had twisting horns poking out from her tied up crimson hair that were similar to Gremory's. Her unyielding eyes were golden like the moon, and she had bat-like wings sticking out of her back. She was wearing a one-piece swimsuit and for some reason also had what looked like a servant's apron on over it. After Zagan took her in as a subordinate, she started to refer to him as royalty.

"This woman is... your subordinate, right?"

"Yeah, sorry. I guess I haven't introduced her yet. This is Enchantress Gremory. She's a sorcerer who possesses enough power to compete for first or second place in strength among my subordinates... I'm sure she doesn't appear that way to you, though."

Judging from her reaction, Zagan was convinced that Lilith was guided here without realizing it. Incidentally, since Nephy and Foll were Zagan's family and not his subordinates, he didn't count them in that power ranking. Barbatos wasn't a subordinate, but more of a collaborator, or maybe he was just paid help, so he wasn't counted either.

Upon hearing such words of praise, Gremory began scratching the tip of her nose.

"Keeheehee, even I am embarrassed to have my liege praise me. Allow me to introduce myself. I'm Gremory, oh princess of the succubi."

Even as Gremory elegantly bowed and introduced herself, Zagan didn't overlook the fact that she was slurping at her lips.

"Gremory, this is my new subordinate, Lilith. I've given her suitable authority to match her role as my mediator with Liucaon. Don't start anything strange, you got that?"

"Keehee, I'll keep that in mind. I'm not such a narrow-minded woman that I'm unable to love without touching someone directly. True love power is something that accumulates infinitely even when gazing from a distance, right?"

The fact that she was surrounded by beautiful girls in swimsuits must have eroded her self-control. Gremory was no longer able to hide her arousal, leaving Lilith completely taken aback.

"H-Hey. Is she alright? I don't understand a thing she's saying."

"It's better for you not to understand, so be at ease. Oh... but as long as she's here, try to stay close to me or Nephy. She won't cause

you any harm, but you'll end up a little exhausted."

"Is that so...? Well, understood."

This girl was clearly to Gremory's tastes, so ignorance was bliss in this case. Gremory's eyes were already sparkling with a blaze in them, but Zagan decided to ignore that. He then shifted his attention over to Lilith.

"By the way, what's with that outfit? Is that also a type of swimsuit?"

Wearing an apron atop a swimsuit did a wonderful job of hiding the swimsuit, making it look like she was wearing an apron and nothing else, which was somewhat troubling. Lilith suddenly turned red and hid her face behind a tray she was holding in her hand.



“Th-This is, um! The elders said that I should be waiting on the Archdemon, and kind of forced me to...”

Lilith looked ready to sink to the floor, but then Gremory gently embraced her shoulders.

“I see there are those in Liucaon who understand reason. Be at ease. You are like a blindingly dazzling gem right now.”

“I-Is that... so? I guess it doesn’t feel bad to get told that!”

Lilith recovered in an instant.

Well, it’s fine as long as she’s okay with it... If he thought about it too deeply he would begin to pity her. Moreover, Lilith’s reaction seemed to fully appease Gremory, so it didn’t seem like she was going to snatch Lilith up and eat her anytime soon.

Zagan then suddenly remembered something.

“Now that I think of it, Alshiera hasn’t meddled with you at all since then, right?”

That completely mysterious vampire seemed more fixated on Lilith than she was on Zagan.

She spoke as if Azazel was referring to Lilith...

“No, I haven’t seen her since. She always appears at the most unexpected times and only leaves behind completely incomprehensible words. She’s been like that for years,” Lilith said as she shrugged her shoulders.

“I see. That does explain her quite well from what I saw.”

Did she already accomplish her objective? Or was she lying in wait and seeing how things played out even now? Zagan didn’t believe for a second that she did something idiotic like die after getting caught up in what happened with Foll.

“Well, if she’s not getting involved, then I guess that’s fine too.”

Besides, Zagan had bigger issues on hand. He stole a glance over at Nephy. A white swimsuit was covering her snow-white skin. Nephy was usually quite charming, but right now she was even more beautiful than usual. Since she was embarrassed by the unusual outfit, she was fidgeting, trying to cover herself with her long hair and squirming about. It was enough to drive Zagan to want to just embrace her on the spot.

So why!? Why can’t I look her in the eyes!? Even though she was so attractive that he felt like his pupils would burn, he couldn’t look at her directly. And, while he writhed in agony over that, Foll suddenly squeezed his hand.

“Zagan, wanna play with us?”

“Hrm... I really do want to, but...”

If he didn’t calm down a little, then it would be troubling to even point his gaze in Nephy’s direction. And as that was going on,

Chastille's group from the church also came over. Perhaps because Gremory was running wild, they were standing aside waiting for an opportunity to cut in.

Chastille was wearing a swimsuit that had a similar style to Foll's with a pareo around her waist. It had a mature feel to it, which was quite unexpected to Zagan.

Hmm. I'm fine looking at her in a swimsuit, huh? He did honestly believe that she looked cute, but it wasn't to the point where he couldn't look directly at her. And that was when Zagan suddenly realized that Chastille's gaze was wandering around restlessly. It was as if she was looking for someone.

I bet she's looking for Barbatos... It had only been a few hours since the last incident. There was no way she forgot in such a short time. And perhaps noticing Zagan's gaze, she straightened herself out and smiled.

"Zagan, Nephly. Thank you for inviting us. Allow me to show my gratitude as the representative of the church. Thanks to you, my subordinates are also able to take a well deth...served break."

Seeing Chastille so plainly bite her tongue, Zagan and Nephly smiled.

"She bit her tongue, huh?"

"She clearly did."

Chastille's gallant expression was reduced to tears in an instant. And upon closer inspection, it was clear that the other Angelic Knights were also looking at her with smiles on their faces.

Aaah... somehow, it feels like it's been a while since we've seen this side of her...

"I-I haven't had any breaks lately, so this is natural!" Chastille exclaimed as she turned beet red upon noticing the gazes pointed at her. In other words, her switch had been stuck on 'work mode' this entire time.

I guess her crybaby part would show up in force after being suppressed for half a month... It seemed that it was the correct choice to invite Chastille along.

Zagan shifted his gaze over to Nephteros, who was letting out a sigh, and Kuroka, who had her head cocked to the side in a worried manner next to Chastille. Nephteros was wearing a dazzling white swimsuit atop her dark skin, while Kuroka had a swimsuit with a cute looking ribbon on it adorning her chest, and even had little ribbons tied around the ends of both her tails. That was clearly Manuela's choice.

Kuroka currently had her cane in hand, and even the Angelic Knights accompanying them in their trunks had swords at their waists or strung along their backs. It was quite commendable of them, but it

definitely looked uncomfortable to wear such belts against their skin.

Manuela prepared swimsuits for these guys...? How did she know that Chastille's entire group would be here? It was truly frightening. She wasn't a sorcerer, but she had a full grasp of the circumstances surrounding sorcerers and the church. Just who exactly was she? In a way, it was a greater mystery than Alshiera.

"Nephteros, Kuroka, sorry, but keep her company."

"Oh well. I suppose it would be troubling if she ended up drowning here."

"I can only get in up to the shore, but I'll do my best!"

Kuroka nodded and clenched both her fists, but Zagan shook his head.

"You don't have to go out of your way to do anything, Kuroka. As long as you're next to her, Chastille's 'carelessness' will decrease by thirty percent. That's more than enough."

Chastille was always concerned about those around her. Kuroka's cane would surely be difficult to use with the sand at her feet and especially in the water. Moreover, Kuroka attracted misfortune of a different type from Chastille's at a greater magnitude, so it was even more worrying that some sort of disaster would happen to her. However, precisely because of that, it would balance out Chastille.

"Even all of you have been looking down on me...?" Chastille remarked reproachfully while drooping her shoulders, to which Nephteros replied with a dead serious expression.

"It would be troubling for me if you died. Is it strange for me to be worried?"

"Huh? No, um, that's not what I..." Chastille began muttering in confusion as if she was unable to decide whether she should be happy or embarrassed at such a straightforward declaration. And just then, a voice which couldn't read the atmosphere at all rang out.

"Hey, Mister Zagan, and you people from the church, are you guys, like, not planning to get in the water? Swimming's fun!"

Even though they had finally crawled out from the bottom of the sea and were now basking in the sun, the siren was slapping the water with her tail and beckoning them back in. She was a girl who was both a servant at Zagan's castle and royalty among the sirens, Selphy.

"We haven't been under the sun for three weeks, so why should we go out of our way to go back into the sea?"

"I mean, everyone's just, like, talking about complicated stuff and looking all troubled, right? You'll feel better if you move around some!"

It seemed she was just bored from being unable to put up with the general mood. And so, she had raised her voice in a bid to cheer everyone up. However, the next one to voice their disapproval was

Chastille.

"I've never tried swimming before... Will I be fine?"

"Huh? Really?" Nephteros asked.

"I mean, there aren't all that many bodies of water large enough to swim around in, right? Our bath was really small too, and swimming in a public bath really is just improper..." Chastille said as she twiddled her fingers in embarrassment.

"Angelic Knights have to go camping when they're on missions, right? Didn't you get in a river or something?"

"There's no way I can go swimming in such a public place! Actually, can you swim, Nephteros?" Chastille asked, trying to shift the focus of the conversation away from herself.

"Do you really think I ever had the opportunity to try?" Nephteros inquired as she looked over to Nephy.

"Nephelia, how about you?"

"Can I swim, you mean? I'm the same as you. Even being allowed to take a bath was a rarity..."

"Sorry. It's my fault for asking you."

The hidden elven village was situated deep within a mountain range, and when Zagan's group had gone to investigate it, they hadn't seen any bodies of water nearby. There was a well in the village, so they had ample access to drinking water, but regardless of all that, Nephy had been basically imprisoned during her childhood there.

Foll seemed to be tired of all the talking already, and began playing around by building a sand hill at Zagan's feet.

"Ummm... then, what about Kuroka?" Chastille asked.

"I'm bad with water!"

An immediate response. Even her two tails were standing on end, and her face was screaming, "Please stop talking about water!" In the end, cats really were bad with water.

"Huh? Then... none of us can swim...?"

A cold silence spread out with that unneeded remark. In truth, Zagan could swim, but he didn't feel like getting in the water right now. Regardless, Selphy dared to further not read the atmosphere.

"Then I'll, like, teach all of you to swim! I'll lead you by your hands so it won't be scary!"

"Y-You will...? Then, I guess..." Chastille muttered to gather her courage, then one of the Angelic Knights raised his voice with resolution.

"Then, would you like to learn as well, Lady Nephteros? Though it may be presumptuous of me to ask, I am quite experienced."

"Huh?"

The Angelic Knight Richard held out his hand like a gentleman, to which Zagan reflexively glared back at him. A cold sweat began

pouring down Richard's brow from having an Archdemon's glare pointed at him. But even so, his smile didn't break. He was the very image of a man doing his best to maintain his courage.

I faintly felt it was the case before, but is this guy trying to court Nephteros? There was no problem with his character... Or actually, compared to a sorcerer, he was a boundlessly upright person, but it felt like he would die if Zagan were to lightly tap him. He just couldn't approve of such a frail man becoming his brother-in-law. Still, Zagan said nothing. Silence was power after all.

First, Zagan would judge him based on how much he could endure this situation where an Archdemon was silently glaring at him. Such was the case, but the Archdemon's silence didn't continue for all that long, since Nephteros suddenly squeezed Zagan's arm.

"Big Bro, can I go swimming?"

"...I guess. Watch out for any strange creatures."

The Archdemon's silence was easily shattered by his sister-in-law's pleading.

"Thanks, Big Bro. Let's go, Chastille."

"Oh, mmm... Okay, see you later, Zagan."

Nephteros took Chastille's hand and ran off. Richard's efforts to withstand an Archdemon's silence were all in vain, as he was left behind... It was a little pitiful. Zagan felt like he'd done something bad, and cleared out his throat with a cough.

"Ummm... If you wish to get closer to Nephteros, then demonstrate enough power to make me acknowledge you first."

"...Understood. I will do my best," Richard said as his shoulders drooped. Then, Kuroka slapped him on the back.

"I-It's alright, Sir Richard! He properly values the efforts of others! Hang in there!"

Just stop already! Being comforted in such a manner just made him feel even more miserable. Richard staggered off toward the shore as the other Angelic Knights patted the young man on his back.

"...Maybe I should be kinder to him next time."

"Yes, please do..." Nephy replied as she covered her face as if she was looking at someone who was extremely pitiful.



With the church group going for a swim, there were now five people left behind on the beach. Zagan, Nephy, Foll, Gremory, and Lilith. Gremory gazed on at Chastille and the others, starting to make merry with a meek expression.

"Hm...? That tabaxi girl is called Kuroka, right?"

This was, in fact, the first time the two of them had met face to face.

“Kuroka is Raphael’s foster daughter. Don’t do anything strange, okay?”

“It’s true that it seems worth it to love her, but she looks worried about something. I’m just a little concerned.”

“Oh?”

Now that Zagan thought of it, the other day, when he had her touch his face, she was strangely perturbed. At that time, he felt like there was some anxiety within her. But he couldn’t quite recall all the details. And as he tried remembering, he suddenly realized something.

“Hang on, this is the first time you two have met, right? How can you even tell?”

“Huh? The moment a young maiden is troubled over self-denial is a love event worthy of breaking into a nosebleed, is it not? There’s no way I would overlook such a thing.”

“...Well, I guess that’s enough for you.”

Zagan was already beyond trying to comprehend what she was saying, but Gremory had her own outlook on things. He was just glad he was blessed with companions who could notice things that he could not. Gremory looked taken aback for but an instant, but broke into her staple ‘Keeheehee’ laugh shortly after.

“I am beyond delighted that I serve a king who understands me.”

“I don’t really want to understand you, though...” Zagan replied dejectedly, at which point Lilith raised her voice timidly.

“U-Um, is it true that Kuroka is worried about something?”

“That’s the way it appears to me, at least. Now, the question is, how to loosen her heartstrings and demonstrate the full effect of love power.”

Zagan tilted his head to the side upon hearing that.

“Kuroka is from the church too, is that alright?”

Even though Chastille was prime material for her love events, Gremory rejected her due to the fact that she was an Angelic Knight.

“That girl isn’t an Angelic Knight, right? She may hold rank, but she doesn’t have the stink of an Angelic Knight. She may be under the patronage of the church, but I don’t sense anything like obligation or loyalty. She probably wanted a title in the church out of a desire for revenge against sorcerers or something like that.”

“You’re... kind of amazing...”

It was truly astounding that she was able to tell so much with a single glance. All this despite Zagan being unable to do so until he saw Kuroka go berserk. And as he expressed his admiration, Lilith cut back into the conversation.

“Um, I want to help her myself... Back when Kuroka’s people were wiped out, I couldn’t do anything for her...”

Gremory’s eyes sparkled as if a delicious meal was right before

her.

“I see... So you’re telling me not to butt in.”

“I-I didn’t mean to be so haughty, but, um... if possible...”

“There’s no reason to shrink back if you’re doing it for your friend. It’s fine. Your determination is noble. You may stick your chest out with pride and declare that you will be the one to save that girl,” Gremory stated as she stroked the tip of Lilith’s jaw with her finger and gently smiled. Then, she said, “However, if you ever need help, then tell me at anytime. There’s no shame in relying on others if it’s for the sake of your friend, after all.”

“Th-Thank you. His Highness’ number one confidant is rather dependable!” Lilith proclaimed as she nodded energetically with full sincerity, but Zagan couldn’t quite accept it all.

I feel like I’m watching a little girl getting tricked by a witch in a fairy tale... Zagan had had more opportunities to read Foll picture books lately, so he ended up recognizing patterns in fairy tales. The story of an unfortunate girl being tricked by a witch seemed to be quite the cliché. And without giving Zagan’s worries any thought, Lilith pressed on.

“Your Highness, um...”

“Yeah, go ahead. It’s your own home, so there’s no need to be serving others here. I’ll just lounge around.”

“Thank you! Then I’ll be off for a bit!” Lilith said as she waved her hand at Zagan and ran off toward her friend.

“Keh, all you idiots are just messing around without giving a rat’s ass about my problems!” Barbatos’ voice suddenly rang out behind them. Upon closer inspection, it was clear that he was peeking in on them from the forest to the rear. In an unusual turn, he had come out of the shadows, but since he was completely enveloped in darkness anyway, he couldn’t be spotted at a glance.

“What, you came?” Zagan said, knitting his brows. Then, he continued with, “How about you start with apologizing while you’re here?”

“Dumbass! For some reason, just looking at that crybaby is making my chest tighten, so I can’t look at her directly!”

You too, Barbatos...? Zagan felt profound sympathy for his predicament, and Barbatos then sunk to the ground and clutched his knees.

“...Why is she dressed like that now? No way I can talk to her at this point!”

“Aaah...”

Unable to find the words, Zagan looked over to Nephy for help.

Tch! It’s no good! I can’t look directly at Nephy either! How did she interpret all that, he wondered.

“Foll, shall we go for a swim together? Miss Selphy did say that she would teach us to swim.”

“Is swimming fun?”

“I don’t know, but shall we try it out and see?”

Foll looked up at Zagan fixedly, but seeing him crouch down into the same pose as Barbatos, she had somehow come to her own understanding.

“Okay, let’s try.”

Nephy took Foll’s hand and they went off toward the shore.

Arrrrgh... I wanted to at least tell her she was beautiful... And just like that, the two pitiful men were left behind.

“Hnnngh, what fragrant love power. Is this yet another way of showing love?”

...And Gremory was happily observing them, so Zagan tried to shoo her away.

“We’re not a damn show. Go play already.”

“Well, just wait a moment. In short, their swimsuits are so dazzling that you can’t look directly at them, right?”

“Erk! Why do you know that!?” Zagan and Barbatos yelled in unison.

“I can easily resolve this issue for you, you know?”

Both Zagan and Barbatos stiffened up at the devil’s irresistible whisper.



“...What do you want in return? Wait, I don’t even have to ask do I...?”

This granny just wanted to watch Zagan and Barbatos run about in confusion.

“What should we do?” Zagan asked, to which Gremory beckoned the two of them over with a mysterious expression. And now, the Archdemon, the villain, and the granny were all squatting down face to face.

“In short, the cause of all this is because it is far too fresh a sight for you two. If you get used to it, it won’t be a problem, right?”

“That does make sense, but are you saying I should just gaze at Nephy from a distance?”

They were sorcerers with poor countenances who looked extremely dangerous. Even Nephy and Chastille would surely pull back from such an act. Such was the case, but Gremory let out a laugh as if she had anticipated Zagan’s reaction.

“Even my liege says such things, I see. Are we not sorcerers?”

“You got a plan or something?” Barbatos cut in.

“It’s the sorcery I proposed moments ago. We can capture an

image as if it were reflected in a mirror. If we can perfect it, there's no problem with staring all day long! Forget that! We can even gaze lovingly upon girls in swimsuits all day long! It is the only way!"

So she declared with a clenched fist, and both Zagan and Barbatos nodded as if she was talking sense.

"...Hah! Looks like the name Enchantress isn't just for show. I'm in!" Barbatos proclaimed, then stood up and exchanged a stiff handshake with Gremory.

"...Tch, I got it. I'll cooperate."

Sorcerer Slayer, Purgatory, Enchantress. These three names were notorious among all sorcerers, and their union had just quietly solidified right here. With these three conspiring together, they could not only shake an entire nation, but reduce it to atoms in a head-on collision. If the church were to discover this, they would assume the apocalypse was upon them and gather their armies. And yet, what the three of them were seriously discussing was how to create an image of the girls they liked in swimsuits. It was truly a trivial and peaceful worry of theirs.

Zagan began by tracing a magic circle in the sand with his finger.

"First off, this is the sorcery I created before. It uses parchment as a medium to project one's memories, but it has a flaw in that its link to one's memories is too strong, so it can only project something deep within one's psyche."

Having chosen to cooperate, Zagan demonstrated what he had at hand. All sorcerers present here possessed enough talent to create the sorcery they were looking for from scratch given the time, but demonstrating something that had already been accomplished contributed greatly to any progress they would make.

"Hmmm. So it seems there's a need to revise the circuit responsible for probing into one's memories. I think my teacher's sorcery should be applicable here," Gremory chimed in.

"Hold up. Won't this cost too much if you use parchment? If we use mana to project it into the air, we don't need a medium, and we can manipulate the size however we want, right?" Barbatos commented.

"I see. You've got talent, Purgatory."

"Hmph, it's nothing impressive, since we've got the base theory right here with us."

These were surprisingly modest words to come from Zagan's undesirable friend. And that just emphasized how seriously he was taking this.

"No, it's something I didn't even think of. You have my thanks, Barbatos."

Zagan never tried to further improve the sorcery, since he had

originally developed it as material to use for teaching Nephy sorcery. It could be called negligence on his part as both an Archdemon and a sorcerer. Luckily, their little gathering was a meeting of the foremost experts in their fields of sorcery, so they rectified his mistake. Zagan's previously defective sorcery was approaching perfection at a terrifying pace.

"With this, there shouldn't be any problem with the spell."

Zagan began a test run of the new sorcery. The air in front of him warped like a lens and projected some scenery about the size of his palm. This was the photography spell that these three great sorcerers gave birth to, and its commemorative first use was a picture of Nephy as she was dressed today: her boundlessly lovely figure wearing a swimsuit. On one hand, Zagan wanted to hit Manuela for doing something unnecessary by just matching her own tastes, but he also wanted to praise her from the bottom of his heart for her ability to pick something beyond perfect for Nephy.

Hnnngh, the stimulation is still too strong! Zagan gently brushed away the image of Nephy, and this time a picture of his cute little daughter was projected in front of him. This image was just purely cute and managed to calm down his emotions. Even Zagan let out a content sigh at how he was able to perfectly control the image being switched out like that.

"Mm, it's perfect. This spell is capable of projecting anything from your memories. We can even switch what is being displayed at will."

"Oooh. It seems to have the advantage of even reproducing the finer details of vague memories, I see," Gremory said in admiration. Then, she continued, "With a little tinkering to the spell, we should be able to imprint the image onto parchment or a mirror or the like. With this, it's possible to cover the walls of the castles with our memories of beautiful maidens!"

"Limit that stuff to a secret room somewhere."

"So you'll allow it?" Barbatos asked. He clearly had not expected that response.

"The flaw of the original sorcery has been solved, but it's inconvenient for it not to have a name. What should we call it?"

"Let's see... it projects one's memories, so how about 'Memorandum' in reference to a record of one's memories?" Gremory replied.

"Not bad. Then let's go with that."

Now that the name had been decided, Gremory smiled as if unable to contain her worldly desires.

"Alright, next is imprinting it onto a medium... so I say, but we're on an uninhabited island. It's questionable if we can get something suitable for that," Gremory muttered with a pensive look on her face.

“The hell? Enchantress Gremory of all people doesn’t even have a single piece of parchment on her?”

“Where am I supposed to carry something like that in this outfit... Hmmm, it might be amusing to imprint it onto my swimsuit.”

“That’s really going too far,” Zagan cut in to stop Gremory’s wild ideas.

“...Well, guess this is where I pitch in. You owe me one, got it?”

Thinking back on it, Barbatos was wearing his usual stuffy robes even though he came to this summer paradise of sun and sand. He was capable of passing through shadows to get anywhere he wanted anyway, so procuring a piece of parchment or two was a simple matter for him. And watching his undesirable friend get up on his high horse, Zagan replied to him coldly.

“Hand it over already. We don’t know when Nephy, Chastille, and the others will notice that we’re scheming something, right?”

“Yeah! That’s right! Thinking of what will happen when my teacher finds me, this may very well be the last sinister trick I get to play in my entire life!”

“Yeah, yeah.”

Zagan felt like some strangely sorrowful plea got mixed into things, but setting that aside, Barbatos pulled out a few pieces of parchment and split them with the group. And as that exchange ended, they all let out a smile.

How long has it been since I got involved with silly little things like this? The most recent memory that came to mind was his days as a waif where he loitered around the back alleys. Back then, he had met the girl who had a picture book with her and the boy who shared a place to sleep with him. The silver-eyed Zagan was somewhat younger than them, but that was exactly why there was also a boy who looked after him while acting like an older brother. Their little band of rascals would sometimes dirty their hands to outwit adults, and sometimes even systematically stole money and goods. At such times, they would gather together like this, making sinister plans while chatting in a lively manner.

Well, I ended up failing, getting caught by a sorcerer, and almost killed, though... Thinking back on it, that was the greatest mistake in Zagan’s life, and also a turning point. He had somehow miraculously turned the tables on the sorcerer, so he had obtained both power and assets. If not for that, he would surely never have met Nephy.

It was an unpleasant past, but still something he would never take back. Even if one of the Archdemons were to develop sorcery to redo one’s life, Zagan didn’t think that he would do his over. No matter how much he suffered in the past, those moments defined him. That was exactly why Zagan could march forward without ever looking

back.

And as Zagan reminisced over such nostalgic memories, he unintentionally ended up projecting his memories to the parchment using Memorandum. A group of dirty looking kids were shown on the parchment, which made Gremory and Barbatos look on in a puzzled manner.

“Huh? You got a bunch of dirty looking brats on yours there, you know?”

“Oops...”

Just as Zagan was about to crumple the parchment up into a ball, he came to a stop.

“I got to see some nostalgic faces, huh? They’re the ones who took care of me before I became a sorcerer.”

Memorandum projected an image of three children. One was Zagan. The other boy in the image was fourteen or fifteen years old. And the girl was somewhere around ten. At the time, Zagan was still eight, and wasn’t very good at pick-pocketing or robbery, so he was on the verge of starving to death. These were the kids who had shared their bread with him.



The boy was the one who had taught Zagan how to survive as a waif, and the girl would read him stories from a picture book. The reason Zagan was even able to become a sorcerer was because they had taught him how to read. In many ways, they were his benefactors.

Nowadays, he didn't clearly remember their faces, but being able to see them so clearly using sorcery really was great. Thinking back on it, it was because of the memories he had with these kids that he had given Foll soup after she attacked him and had taken her in.

"The fact that they looked after my liege would make these children sorcerers too?" Gremory asked in a puzzled voice.

"Does it look that way? They were just fellow waifs. There were a bunch who just suddenly showed up, then suddenly disappeared. It was rare for the three of us to even gather together, so even I don't know much about them."

And as Zagan talked about it, a thought suddenly came to mind.

I wonder if they're still alive? Those two kids weren't there when Zagan hatched his failed plan. He didn't think they were killed by the sorcerer Andras or anything, but they all lived lives where it wouldn't have been strange if they just up and died somewhere. If they were alive, they would be in their twenties by now, so he wondered how they were doing.

This should all have been worthless reminiscing, but Gremory and Barbatos were strangely fixated on his Memorandum.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing, it's just this one..."

Barbatos pointed at one of the children in the Memorandum. It was the boy who was somewhat like a leader among the three children. He had chestnut colored hair and dark brown eyes. On his face were large round glasses that he must have pilfered from somewhere that looked ready to slip off at any time.

Glasses were rather expensive goods that were said to be able to correct defects in vision without the aid of sorcery. A waif would desire food to survive another day much more than trying to correct their vision. The fact that he didn't sell them for money may have been because they were some sort of memento too.

After pointing the boy out, the next words out of Barbatos' mouth were truly unexpected.

"I feel like I know this guy?"

"...What?"

Zagan stared back in wonder, to which even Gremory nodded.

"Hmmm... I also find that face familiar."

Both Barbatos and Gremory were famous sorcerers who were once Archdemon candidates. If both of them recognized someone, it meant

they were someone quite well known in that circle.

“Did this guy become a sorcerer?”

“Hmm, I wonder? I feel like I recognize the face, but I could just be mistaking him for someone else.”

As Barbatos scratched his head over the matter, Gremory continued on in a quizzical voice.

“If it was just you, Purgatory, then it may be a case of mistaken identity. But I also feel like I know this face. Not only that, this is my liege’s benefactor. I don’t think it’s a coincidence.”

An unintentional silence hung in the air.

“What’s this guy’s name?” Barbatos asked.

“His name...? What was it...? Marco...? No, that’s not it. Marc. Yes, his name is Marc.”

Zagan didn’t know his family name, and he didn’t know if that was his real name, but that was what he called him. The girl in the picture was called Stella. Both of them would just up and disappear now and then, so Zagan didn’t even know what kind of connection the two of them had if any at all.

Now that I think of it, I feel like he was the one who named me Zagan. Plus, he had even taught Zagan how to do things like steal and fight without getting anything in return.

It was pretty natural that Barbatos and Gremory didn’t recognize the name that Zagan brought up. It was actually quite common for people to throw away their old names upon becoming sorcerers. There was no guarantee that he still went by the name Marc.

Good grief, I came here to get a break...

It felt like Zagan had struck upon a pit of vipers.



“...I’m hungry,” Foll muttered in a serious tone while Zagan and the others were amusing themselves with their wiles. This despite her having had lunch only moments ago. Nephy, who was building a sand hill together with her, stared on in wonder.

“It’s because you haven’t moved around much lately. You must be tired from all this.”

“But I had lunch already...”

“It’s good that you have an appetite. Let’s see. In that case, shall we head off to the forest and look for food? There seem to be berries growing there.”

It was an attractive proposal, but Foll shook her head.

“I don’t feel like that would be enough...”

The conversation wasn’t in the realm of her wanting to eat candy or anything, it was more like she wanted some real prey to feast on. To put a scale on how serious it was, Foll was looking over at Selphy

energetically swimming about and seriously wondering if it was alright just to chew on her. She didn't feel the desire to eat the other humans and such when she looked at them, but the siren Selphy kind of looked like seafood. That must have been the reason.

What do I do? I should be listening to Zagan and behave myself here... As for the root cause of her hunger, it was likely because she had distanced herself from Atlastia, and consequently from the Dragon Form, lowering the ratio of mana she was absorbing from it. Even now, she was steadily resupplying her mana from it, but it was about a third less than what she was getting from the room in the ocean capital.

Also, just as Nephy said, she hadn't moved around in quite a while, so it had just stimulated her hunger all at once. It wasn't so severe that she had to dash off and chow down immediately, but it would be somewhat difficult for her to relax and play like this.

Even though she had just caused a big incident by not listening to Zagan, she felt like she was about to do it again. It left a prickling pain in her chest.

The Black Dragon was no longer able to find joy in just moving from battle to battle and turned to committing atrocities... Even though Foll was Wise Dragon Orobas' daughter, she had become the Black Dragon. She hated being the Black Dragon. Everyone looked to be having fun, but she started to wonder if it was better for her to just go back on her own. And just as she began thinking of such things...

"Nephy. I've kept you waiting."

Zagan's group was headed toward them after finishing whatever they were doing on the beach. It was like they had just finished some sort of 'training.' It seemed like he had conquered his inability to look Nephy straight in the eyes... or rather, his inability to look at her at all.

"Ah, hnnnngh..."

Maybe not. It felt like it was taking his utmost effort to resist the urge to avert his gaze.

Is he shy? Is Zagan's shyness going on full display?

Keeping his own lesson of 'observing your opponent' in mind, Zagan was staring fixedly at Nephy. Having said that, even Nephy's ears were bright red and her gaze was wandering around, so she wasn't all that different. That only amplified his shyness though, and Zagan eyes just shot further open as if screaming, 'It's no good like this!'

"Y-Your swimsuits seem to have been prepared by Manuela, but how do you like them?"

"Y-Yes! Um, it's somewhat like underwear, so I can't really calm down. But..." Nephy trailed off, then mustered her courage and

whispered in a faint voice, "I think... your swimsuit... is wonderful... Master Zagan..."

"Ah!" Zagan exclaimed. Then, he pinned down his chest as if he didn't expect that reaction at all. Nevertheless, the Archdemon didn't bend a knee and folded his arms as he stood upright.

"Y-Your swimsuit... is also quite... charming. It's so charming I can't look directly at it!"

He once more added an unnecessary addendum. Though perhaps, in this case, it was correct. Zagan arched back as if wanting to smash in his own head. Nephy's face turned bright red as if she were delirious with a fever from his unusually frank words, then nodded with a bob as if she wasn't all that dissatisfied with his comment.

"Th-Thank you... very much..."

Foll realized that the frantic emotions she had just moments ago vanished cleanly after watching their little exchange. It even led her to believe that Zagan put on this petty play because he noticed she was feeling down. Though immediately after thinking that, she realized that he would be much better at dealing with Nephy if he were that skilled.

Foll naturally broke into a smile, but she was a little worried that perhaps these two had completely forgotten about her. That was why she tried being a little selfish.

"Zagan, how about me?"

"Mm. You're splendidly cute."

"...Eheheh."

Zagan pet her head, leading her to unintentionally laugh like a child.

But, I decided not to overstretch myself, so this might just be fine.

"Master Zagan, Foll was saying that she is hungry, but what shall we do?" Nephy asked as she suddenly recalled the earlier issue..

"Hm? Oh, I guess it really wasn't enough, huh?"

Just from that single phrase, Zagan was able to accurately grasp Foll's condition. Next, he called out to the others in a loud voice.

"Lilith, is there an area of the ocean here with large marine life?"

"Well, I think there is. Why?" Lilith cocked her head to the side as she responded.

"I want to try what people call fishing," Zagan stated as he stuck out both his hands as if gripping a sword.

Lilith stared back in shock.

"Fishing...? Huh? You're going to fish those up?"

"Yeah."

"Huh? But why large marine life?"

"We've got so many sorcerers and Angelic Knights gathered here, don't you think regular fishing would be boring?"

“I don’t!” Lilith screamed out on the verge of tears. Then, she said, “What will come out of trying to fish large marine life!”

“It’ll be good exercise, and it should satiate Foll’s hunger. Doesn’t it fulfill everything we need?”

“It’s a disaster for me, though!”

Giving a sidelong glance to their new family member raising a fuss, Foll’s vague anxiety that she had been feeling for the past half a month was now becoming clear.

Zagan... factored everything in from the start, even with this break...

During the incident half a month ago, Foll got a true sense of just how much she was loved. Foll did something bad and caused Zagan trouble, yet he didn’t get angry, forgave her, accepted her, helped her, and saved her. He never desired anything in return. He was just happy from the bottom of his heart that Foll was safe. However, she felt anxious precisely because she had so much of his favor.

Why am I loved so much when I’m such a bad kid...? How could she ever repay him? Her weak and tiny self had nothing to offer him at all. It was a truly ignorant and meaningless worry. If she was being loved, then wasn’t it plainly clear what she had to do in return?

“Zagan.”

“What is it?”

“Thanks. I love you.”

Those words naturally flowed from Foll’s mouth. Zagan stared back in wonder, but immediately nodded and gently brushed her head.

“Yeah, me too.”

She would build up her strength in a way that was suitable for her age. And then, she would protect the daddy and mommy that she loved so much. That was the answer that Foll found.



“Hmmm. This seems like a good spot.”

Zagan brought his small boat to a stop in the open seas around the uninhabited island. Lilith had prepared six boats for the whole group. It was just right for two people per boat.

The groups were Zagan and Nephy, Foll and Nephteros, Gremory and Lilith, Chastille and Kuroka, Richard and some Angelic Knight Zagan didn’t know, and then for some reason the odd combination of Barbatos and Selphy. They were all seated in the boats facing each other. The third pitiful Angelic Knight fell out of a boat on the way, so he was left on the beach as a judge.

“Master Zagan. This is my first time fishing, so I’m rather nervous.”

Nephy’s figure as she timidly held up the fishing rod was as

charming as ever.

Finally! I'm finally able to look at Nephy without averting my gaze!

The time he had spent staring at Nephy's figure in the projection made using Memorandum—keeping his borderline perverted behavior out of sight—was quite painful. Why did he have to resort to such tomfoolery when the person herself was available right next to him?

In any case, thanks to his tomfoolery, he had somehow become able to maintain his composure next to Nephy, and he took a good long gaze at Nephy as she timidly gripped a fishing rod for the first time.

Her arms and thighs were usually covered by her dress and long sleeves, but were now fully exposed. Her snow white skin was absolutely dazzling everywhere he looked. As for the pure white swimsuit which covered the important bits, even though it was quite bold, it was still in the realm of being neat and clean. Though he was reluctant to admit it, he honestly admired Manuela's abilities.

Girls have such thin waists huh...? Her collarbone and the nape of her neck are also really pretty. But if I keep staring too much it feels like I'm being lewd. Not that my heart can withstand any more!

...In any case, Zagan ended up just sneaking glances repeatedly. Thinking back on it, this was the first time Zagan had seen so much of Nephy's skin exposed since Manuela had made her wear something strange back at her shop the first time they went shopping. Zagan was panicking the entire time though and didn't really take a good look. So could he actually endure being on the same boat with the girl dearest to him while she wore a swimsuit?

No, this isn't a trial. It's a moment of bliss.

He was somewhat too stimulated so his happiness and pain were getting all mixed up. Wasn't this an endlessly luxurious moment where he could monopolize the girl that was dearest to him? Zagan finally calmed down enough to become self aware of this fact. That's why he let out a nostalgic laugh.

"Hmph, do not worry Nephy. Back in the day, I caught fish with my bare hands. It is not all that difficult."

Kianoides was a town on a canal. Having said that, it was an enormous trade city. There was nothing but merchant ships coming up and down the canal, so it wasn't all that clean, but there were fish living there nonetheless.

Back in his days as a waif, Zagan had jumped into the canal when he couldn't stand his hunger anymore, pretended to be dead, and captured any fish who drew near thinking they could get a meal themselves. After recounting such tales of his childhood, there was an entire group around him on the verge of tears, but he didn't notice them at all. And perhaps because Zagan and Nephy were talking about

such things, the other boats also began whispering amongst themselves.

“Nephteros, catch a big one. I’ll do my best to eat it.”

“Huh? Did we gather here to fish you up a snack?” Nephteros was somewhat perplexed by Foll’s request, but she didn’t show any signs of finding that unpleasant. “It can’t be helped. I’ll fish up a big one, so look forward to it.”

Nephteros gripped her fishing rod with a determined smile on her face... and the hook got caught in Barbatos’ hair who was in another boat altogether. Well, Zagan saw that his sister in law was enjoying herself from that, so it was but a small problem.

“Keeheehee, how fortuitous for me to be accompanied by the beautiful princess of the succubi. It just shows that walking the tightrope between life and death was all worth it.”

“Heehee, I see His Highness’ followers truly understand reason. I’ll show you a splendid nightmare as a reward.”

Seeing Lilith puff out her chest in a haughty manner, Gremory smiled back with the look of an affectionate mother.

“My liege! I request that if I win, I get to love around Lady Lilith until I’m satisfied. Do you mind?”

“Aah... well, sure why not.”

“...Huh?”

Zagan nodded like he didn’t really care. Lilith didn’t seem to understand what exactly Gremory meant by ‘love around,’ but she stiffened up upon sensing a dangerous presence from her. Well, it was possible that she would be in for some mental trauma, but there was no risk to her life. On the contrary, Gremory’s love power obsession may have been a good match for Lilith.

It’s fine as long as she doesn’t pick up any strange tendencies herself...

However, now that she was one among Zagan’s subordinates, she had no choice but to get used to this granny. Even Zagan himself could do nothing about that. There was just no other way. And as he held back a sigh, he suddenly heard someone screaming.

“L-Lady Chastille! Is this boat sinking!?”

“Eeek!? Why!? There was no problem when we got on!”

Apparently one of the boats was a lot more worn out than the others. Both Kuroka and Chastille were desperately scooping out as much water as they could. Apparently the combination of their unfortunate dispositions caused some sort of resonance to just amplify their misfortune further. It looked like it wasn’t just added up on top of each other, it was more like a multiplicative effect, meaning things would just get even more outrageous from here.

“It may have been wrong to allow those two to group together at all...”

Though the reason it ended up like this was because Kuroka requested to stay by Chastille's side.

"Master Zagan, is it fine for me to help them...?"

"Please do. Sinking before we even begin is just far too pitiful."

Zagan returned a grave nod to his bride's plea that she couldn't just watch it any longer. Nephy leaned over the side of the boat, and touched the water's surface as she muttered something.

"Fairies of the forest, please save them."

With that, Chastille's boat began clattering about.

"Wh-Wh-What is it now!?"

Taking a closer look, Chastille's boat was now covered in moss and had leaves and such growing out of it here and there. It seemed that Nephy had restored the vitality of the wood used for the boat and stopped it from letting in water. They now had one green boat among their little group, but that was a trivial matter.

"This is... Nephy? Thanks. You're a good friend."

Now that the boat of misfortune had calmed down, this time Richard's boat drew closer to Zagan.

"Lord Archdemon, I have a request of you as well."

His expression looked like he was challenging death itself. So Zagan quietly replied.

"Mm. Speak."

Urged on to continue, Richard took a deep breath, and yelled out as his eyes shot open.

"If I win, please allow me to court Lady Nephteros!"

And even Zagan admired his straightforwardness.

"Hmm... Very well. Demonstrate your power to me. Depending on the results, I'll allow you to at least speak to her. I don't know whether she will accept it herself though."

"Sir! I'll do my very best!"

I do think he's a good guy...

If he was just a regular peasant, Zagan would probably have no objections at all. It would be fine for Zagan just to place him under his patronage. However, the man known as Richard was an Angelic Knight. It could be said that he possessed an outstanding disposition and was an excellent Angelic Knight. He would surely lay down his life to protect Nephteros and the general populace. But precisely because of that, he would inevitably die one day.

At any rate, the woman this man longed for was Nephteros. Even if Zagan were to take him under his patronage, Bifrons would one day break through the contract that Zagan had forced on them and aim for her once more. Even if that didn't happen, he was an outstanding Angelic Knight thrust full force into the dead center of the world of sorcerers. In other words, Zagan would be unable to fully protect him.

Looking at it from the side of the Angelic Knights, they would surely refuse the patronage of an Archdemon. In such a case, it would be troublesome if he didn't possess the personal strength to survive on his own. If he were to woo Nephteros and she were to fall in love with him, she would definitely lose him one day. All that was left after that was the revenge that Foll desired after losing her father, or the despair Orias felt from losing those she was meant to protect, or the reckless path Kuroka went down upon losing Raphael.

Zagan didn't want Nephteros—who was already burdened with being Nephy's clone—to carry even more weight on her shoulders. At the very least, this man had to be able to survive being brushed aside lightly by Zagan without dying. It would be a different story altogether if he wielded a Sacred Sword though.

But, it feels like he doesn't have a chance at all with Nephteros right now, or she doesn't really get it at all yet.

As such, it was probably fine for Zagan to at least evaluate whether any potential suitors had the qualifications to court her. Well, he at least had some nerves, so there was some hope for him.

And as this was all going on, Zagan could hear a noisy voice coming from far away.

"Mister Barbatos, you're like, Mister Zagan's friend, right!? I saw you a few times at the castle, but this is like the first time we've talked, right? Nice to meet'cha!"

"Huh...? Um, sure."

"Hahahah, Lilith and Kuroka got scooped up right away, so I totally thought I was gonna get stuck all alone! Thanks for hopping aboard with me!"

"... Um, sure... Mm..."

"Let's like, catch a whole lotta big fish and show Miss Chastille your good side!"

"Huh? Wait a sec. Why do you know... I mean, what're you saying? Why do I need to show that crybaby..."

Barbatos' expression was getting even more gloomy as if he didn't believe any of what he was saying himself.

Seriously, why didn't this guy just ride with Chastille?

It was the perfect opportunity for him to apologize. He was probably waiting for the opportunity to invite her, and in all his confusion he ended up getting left behind by everyone and got stuck with whoever else was left. Even Zagan could never guess that this egotistical man would be so awkward.

Everyone was off carrying out their own conversations, but after Zagan cleared his throat with a cough everyone quieted down.

"Alright, I'll explain the rules."

The windy seas made it difficult to hear people talk under normal

conditions, so Zagan used sorcery to carry his voice over to all the boats and began explaining things.

“Did everyone get a fishing rod?”

It was all done on the moment, but Zagan had specially prepared fishing rods distributed to everyone. And after confirming that everyone had one in hand, he continued his explanation.

“These fishing lines are made of dragon hair, and the rods have Celestian carved into them to prevent them from snapping. The hooks have a charm cast on them by an Archdemon, so it’ll be easy to attract beings with abundant mana.”

Naturally, it was made in a way that it would grip into a fish without using anything as bait. Everyone around Zagan was now astir.

“Huh? Wait a minute? Doesn’t that make this a tool on level with the Sacred Swords and Holy Treasures...?”

“Why are dragons, elves, and an Archdemon making something like a fishing rod?”

“This is the first time I’ve seen such squandering of mana and technology...”

Zagan felt like they were all lamenting what he did, but he decided to just ignore them all.

“Anyways, there was an objection to using these things as much as we want because we could run this entire area of the ocean extinct if we kept at it. So everyone is limited to fishing up one big one. I’ll have everyone compete with who can bag the biggest game in one try.”

Zagan looked over to Lilith as he explained this, but she was still covering her face as if a calamity was occurring before her.

“Your terminology is all wrong for fishing... Why are you referring to it as game instead of fish? Just what are you all planning to fish up here?”

“You sure got it tough, huh Lilith? You even gotta, like, worry about the ocean itself.”

“Isn’t this the sirens’ ocean? Why are you talking like it’s none of your business?”

“I mean, I totally ran away from home, sooooo...”

Selphy let out an optimistic laugh, to which Lilith buckled over and pinned down her stomach like she couldn’t take it anymore. So Zagan decided to treat her to some candy or something later out of sympathy.

Next up, Nephteros raised her hand.

“Hey. What do we do if we fish up multiple in one go?”

“Oops, you’re right. Well, in that case we’ll pick the biggest one from the—”

“Wait a minute. Why is there a case where you can fish up multiple at a time? We’re fishing, right!? We’re fishing using fishing

rods, right!?”

Lilith was clamoring on the verge of tears, but unfortunately she was the only one present who found this strange.

“I mean, we’re using dragon hair, right? If you just play with it a little you can at least catch up a whole bunch, right?”

Zagan fiddled with his fishing rod like it was nothing at all and it formed a number of hoops while making sounds like it was cutting through the wind.

“Even without that, we’ve got an Archdemon’s hook attached to it. You can punch through a whole bunch of them all at once, right?”

Barbatos swung his fishing rod, and it parted the sea as if ferocious sorcery was fired into it. Even if an Angelic Knight were to swing their rod down, they would likely be able to pierce the very bottom of the ocean.

“I see, so it can be used like that too, huh?”

“We can’t fall behind those damn sorcerers. Let’s do this Richard!”

Even the Angelic Knights, who seemed to have the most common sense among the bunch, began to seriously consider all this.

“...I can’t take it anymore. I want to go back to the land of dreams.”

And Lilith was finally reduced to cradling her knees and burst into tears.

“Is this something to cry over? It’s a waste of your beautiful face. I want to see your smile. Hm?”

“Mistress Gremory....”

She’s been completely tamed...

Zagan felt like he did something quite cruel, but he wasn’t going to stop now.

“As for the prize for the victor... Let’s see... You all seem to have something you desire, so I shall grant one of your wishes. Also, you’re disqualified if your boat capsizes. The same applies if one of you falls in the ocean.”

If he didn’t set the limits now, he felt like someone would get lost before the fishing ended. He was especially wary of the unfortunate pair.

“That’s all. Any questions?”

Zagan took a look at everyone after finishing his explanation. After confirming that nobody had any objections or questions, he yelled out.

“Very well, let the fishing contest begin!”

There were those who wanted their wish granted, those putting on airs, those who were simply hungry, and the fishing contest quietly began with that mixture of expectations.



“Nothing is happening...” Nephy muttered curiously.

Once the fishing contest began, all the boats took some distance from each other, and they were no longer able to hear each other talking.

Well, no matter how amazing a fishing rod was, there was no way she would get a bite the moment she dropped her line in. If that were the case, the contest would end in an instant, so Zagan’s charm wasn’t made to be that powerful.

The boat had fixtures on it for fishing rods, so there wasn’t even a need to hold onto them until they got a bite. What Nephy was saying was perfectly correct, and the other boats were in a similar situation. There were those who were panicking, those who were smiling, letting their imagination run wild in envisioning their victory, and those who were simply taking it easy. What they all had in common was that nobody had caught anything yet.

As such, Zagan nodded with a smile.

“Well, that’s how fishing goes. Having said that, this is also my first time using a rod for it.”

Nephy tilted her head to the side like she couldn’t believe what she was hearing.

“Huh? You said that you lured in fish by playing dead... so you were underwater when you did that?”

“Well, that’s how it went.”

“What did you do about breathing?”

“I somehow managed for a few minutes.”

Once in a while he did almost just die like that, but there wasn’t really a need to mention that now.

Frankly, fishing was my final resort when I was dying of starvation, so I only did it when I thought it would be simpler to just drown anyways.

As Zagan vaguely brushed the question aside, Nephy finally let the strength out of her shoulders and smiled.

“So fishing is meant to be time spent just enjoying yourself and relaxing, I see.”

“Exactly. We haven’t been able to just sit back and relax for a while now. This kind of thing isn’t bad once in a while, right?”

“Yes. It’s great.” Nephy answered, and then for some reason, she tightly closed her lips as if tensing up over something. “Um, Master Zagan.”

“What is it?”

“Um... E-Excuse me!”

The boat rocked about gently. Nephy gathered her courage and sat herself down at Zagan’s side.

“N-Nephy?”

She didn't say anything back at Zagan's bewilderment, and timidly—yet without any hesitation—leaned against Zagan's shoulder. As her dainty shoulder came in contact with his boorish arm, both of them shook with a start.

“...”

Nephy said nothing at all as if implying this was taking all of her effort, but her face was so red it felt like it was going to let out steam.

Hnnnngh! To think Nephy would be so assertive!

It surely took a considerable amount of courage just to sit right next to him, and she was even trying her best to bring things even further. A burning sensation welled up within Zagan's chest. Thinking back to when they first met, Nephy had given up on everything in life because of what had happened to her and didn't know at all how to interact with others—not that Zagan was any different—and now she was capable of actively making her will apparent like this.

This was surely one of the results of clearly communicating their feelings to each other and becoming lovers.

Lovers! That's right! We can call ourselves lovers now!

Zagan could feel that both their hearts were beating like drums. There was no way an Archdemon could act timidly after Nephy had mustered her courage like this. Zagan leaned back against Nephy, who was now covering her face in shyness.

Silence.

But, a comfortable one.

The quiet sound of the waves rang out like a metronome.

“The sound of the ocean is beautiful,” Nephy murmured.

“Mm. It's not bad. Well, it's not as beautiful as your singing though.”

“...That's embarrassing, Master Zagan.”

Nephy cast her gaze downwards as her ears once more turned bright red. Her pure white hair came down and tickled Zagan's arm. The sensation was enough to send him to heaven. Nephy's outfit had a terrifyingly destructive power all on its own, but Zagan knew that the fact that he was himself half naked made him all the more sensitive.

Huh? Does that mean it's the same for Nephy?

As that thought passed his mind, he suddenly wanted to try touching Nephy. Her ears and the nape of her neck were already sensitive when she was wearing clothing. In that case, it would be better to avoid them and go for her shoulder... or just go for broke and embrace her by the waist.

No way! That's going way too fast for me!

He was finally able to look directly at Nephy wearing a swimsuit. His courage would collapse if he didn't do something a little less

nerve-wracking. In that case, maybe her thighs... would be even more lewd, and that led him back into his cycle of agonizing. He was beating himself up over his desire to touch her...

“M-Master Zagan! The rod is shaking!”

It seemed that something had taken the bait. Nephy grabbed the fishing rod in a hurry, but she was unable to properly grip it due to her nervousness. Zagan finally came back to his senses, and wrapped his arms around Nephy and grabbed the fishing rod.

“It’s alright. Just calm down and pull it... Whoa!”

Zagan and Nephy were sitting side by side with their fishing rods cast off the boat. And somehow, he was now hugging her from behind. More specifically, he was gripping the rod over Nephy’s hands.



A sweet scent brushed his nose. Her soft hair tickled not only his cheeks, but his chest and stomach. He even thought it would be great to just throw away the fishing rod and continue hugging her like this.

“Um, um, Master Zagan, what do I do?”

Nephy’s trembling voice brought Zagan back to his senses.

“Oh yeah, let’s see...” After thinking it over a bit, Zagan put on airs as he explained it to her. “It seems to be quite the large one. If we pull it up with brute force, there’s a chance the line will snap. Let’s pull it up gradually.”

Judging from the feedback, it was entirely true that something large had taken a bite, but the fishing line was made from dragon hair. It was tough enough to fish up a small castle without any problems.

Just a little longer... I just want to hold her like this a little longer...

Thinking about it carefully, he hadn’t been able to fully enjoy some time alone with Nephy for quite a while. Surely nobody would complain if he clung to this moment of happiness for just a little bit longer.

Nevertheless, the fishing rod’s limit approached while Nephy spent all her effort on pulling back on it. The rod and line would surely withstand it all, but it was possible for the hook to become detached. It would all be for nothing if Nephy’s first catch were to get away.

“Alright, let’s pull it up together.”

“U-Understood!”

““Puuull!””

Zagan and Nephy pulled back on the fishing rod together and found a golden fish attached to the hook. Or maybe it couldn’t really be called a fish? It had an elongated body like that of a snake, and whiskers like a dragon. Above all else was its size. If one were to unwind it and stretch out its body, it would be about three time’s Zagan’s height.

This won’t fit on the boat, huh?

The fish thrown into the air was far larger than any human. Zagan cast some sorcery to suspend it in midair so that it wouldn’t escape back into the sea.

“I-I did it! Master Zagan! Please look! I managed to fish one up!” Nephy proclaimed in delight.

She was moving about in high spirits while still in his arms, so her skin, hair, and chest were brushing up against Zagan, making him feel like he would go to heaven from the euphoria.

Holy crap, this is the first time I’ve seen Nephy so pleased with herself like this.

Nevertheless, Zagan managed to pull himself together.

“Mm. It was magnificent. Moreover, this here is a divine guardian. It’s quite the big catch, Nephy.”

It was around twenty to thirty kilos. That only amounted to the weight of a child, but the force it exerted when pulling back on the fishing rod was in an entirely different dimension. If not for the special fishing rod, it was quite likely that Zagan and Nephy would have been pulled into the water instead.

Nephy gazed over her first ever catch.

“How beautiful... Is this... a fish?”

The elven village lay deep within the mountains. The first time she saw a fish was likely in the markets in Kianoides, so a divine guardian was likely completely unknown to her.

“It is. An extremely valuable one at that. It’s even quite valuable as a catalyst for sorcery. You don’t see them very often because they live pretty deep down in the ocean. When they do show up in a marketplace, they’ll sell for hundreds of gold coins. This is the biggest one I’ve ever seen myself too.”

Back in his days as a waif, Zagan thought of trying to steal one since they sold for so much, but he had no choice but to give up once he saw that they were even being guarded by armed mercenaries.

The divine guardian was still flopping about within Zagan’s air bubble. The way it did so somehow reminded Zagan of Selphy and made him feel strangely ill at ease, but disregarding that thought, Zagan called out to the judge.

“Foll. Nephy bagged the first game.”

“Nephy! Amazing!”

“...Hmph. You’re good.”

“Heehee. I’m happy as long as you are, Foll.”

Nephy bashfully smiled as Foll and Nephteros praised her so frankly, and Zagan flung the divine familiar over to Foll, who had sparkles in her eyes.

“M-Master Zagan?”

“Hey, wait a—”

Nephy and Nephteros were both bewildered by this act, but Foll opened her mouth wide and chomped down on the divine familiar. She then slurped it in as if it were a noodle.

“Tasty. It’s all smooth when it goes down, yet the mana is so thick. 90 points.”

Foll gave her meal a score in satisfaction. Nobody knew whether this was high or low since it was the first one, but there was no mistake that Nephy’s catch would be the standard everything else would be scored against. Such was the case, but Nephy was trembling in place. Looking closely, she even had tears in her eyes.

“H-Huh...? What’s wrong, Nephy?”

“Sh-Sh-She... ate it...”

It seemed that Nephy wasn’t expected her commemorative first catch to get eaten up all of a sudden. She was trying her best to put on a smile, but was still trembling with tears in her eyes like Chastille would.

Crap. The plan here was only to fish up snacks for Foll...

Nephy’s current behavior was cute in its own right, but it may have been a better idea to wait for everyone to finish catching something before feeding Foll... But in that case Foll would be rather pitiful for having to wait despite her hunger.

Foll also seemed to be flustered thinking that she did something bad, but Zagan suddenly thought of something.

“Oh! That’s right Nephy. You may want to take a look at this!”

Zagan formed a rectangle with his fingers and an image was projected there by mana. This was the Memorandum that he developed together with Gremory and Barbatos earlier. As an image of the divine guardian they just caught took form, Nephy’s expression brightened up remarkably.

“Is this the sorcery you taught me once before, Master Zagan?”

“Yeah. But it’s developed a bit since then. Now it’s possible to choose what is displayed and even project it into midair.”

“Oooh.”

Nephy looked fascinated with the Memorandum.

Great. Looks like she’s cheerful again.

His bride’s troubled expression was a delicacy, but her sadness felt like it could split his heart. Zagan was relieved that this was resolved, but now Nephy’s entire body stiffened up. Zagan realized what was going on all too late. Even now, he was hugging her from behind with the fishing rod clasped in front of them.

“Uuuh, th-this is!”

Zagan tried to separate from her in a fluster, but Nephy squeezed onto his arms.

“...Is it okay... to stay like this... a little longer?”

Perhaps because she had such liberal clothing on, Nephy seemed to be quite assertive today. And so, Zagan cleared out his throat and hugged her back.

“Only until I catch something, alright?”

Nothing had bitten on Zagan’s fishing hook yet, but it was fine for him if nothing ever did.



Shortly after Nephy made the first catch, excited voices could be heard here and there from the other boats. Zagan kept a firm grip on

his own fishing rod and took a glance over to the others.

“You’ve got a bite Richard!”

“I know! But what power! I feel like I’ll be the one to be pulled in!”

“Dammit man! You’re not alone! Win and wrest that reward from the Archdemon!”

“Steve, you’re such a...! Thanks!”

Richard also seemed to have hooked up a big one, and both he and the other Angelic Knight were pulling on the fishing rod together.

It paints an awfully stuffy picture over there... but they look to be having fun in their own way...

It was troublesome for both Zagan and Nephteros if he were to raise the tension like that around them, but looking at it from a distance was quite amusing. It appeared that Gremory and Lilith also had a bite at this time.

“Mistress Gremory! I got one too!”

“Mm! That small glance of your stomach under your apron the moment you stoop over is another form of beauty perfected! Swimsuits and aprons! Your grandfather may just be a genius for thinking up such a combination!”

“O-Oh come on, G-Gramps isn’t really...! Wait! Mistress!? Aren’t you going to help!?”

“I’ll help if I feel like it. However, you should still have some power in you. Won’t you allow me to have my fill of watching you try so hard for my sake?”

“...Huh? Was I maybe tricked here?”

Zagan averted his gaze in pity.

Aaaah... she noticed...

Lilith’s face stiffened up, but she didn’t show any signs of throwing the rod away and running... not that there was anywhere to go atop their little boat as Gremory continued to ogle her.

As for Foll and Nephteros, Nephteros had managed to get a bite herself.

“I’ve got one! All I need to do is pull it up, right?”

“Hang in there Nephteros.”

Her white swimsuit looked blindingly dazzling against her dark skin as the light from mana wrapped around Nephteros’ arms and legs. Nephteros was a high elf, but also one who possessed considerable power as a sorcerer. She skillfully supplemented her physical strength with mana and pulled up her prey in a single breath.

“I did it!”

What Nephteros fished up was a small fish in the shape of something like a dragon.

“...What’s this? It’s so small.”

“Nephteros, that looks tasty. Can I eat it?”

“By all means.”

Even with disappointment plastered on her face, Nephteros held out the dragon-like fish to Foll. And just like the divine guardian, Foll swallowed it whole in one gulp.

“...! The mana is overflowing with such a rich taste! It’s like Nephy’s pudding. 93 points.”

“Huh? Even though it was so small?”

“It was small, but its mana was amazing. Also, it was tasty. I want another.”

It seemed that size wasn’t all that mattered in terms of score. Nephteros puffed out her chest in pride having received a score higher than Nephy’s and thrust out her fingers in a V towards her.

“Master Zagan, Nephteros looks so happy, it’s cute.”

“Well, she is your sister Nephy. It’s only natural that she’d be cute.”

Nephy and Zagan talked about such things as they waved back to her, but Nephteros was too far away to hear them. Nephteros then gripped her fishing rod once more.

“Hey, Big Bro. It’s fine to keep fishing even if we’re not going for points, right? Can I keep going?”

“Well, just a bit is fine.”

If they over-fished the area too much then Lilith would be left in distress, but it was surely fine to fish up two or three more snacks up for Foll. Hearing Zagan’s reply, Foll hugged Nephteros.

“Thanks. I love you Nephteros.”

“...Geez. It can’t be helped then.”

Everyone was starting to show results here and there, but Barbatos and Selphy were still sitting there in silence with nothing going on.

“Mister Barbatos, if you don’t get rid of that gloomy atmosphere around you the fish will just run away, you know?”

“Tch, why do I gotta go along with this childish bullshit?”

“Huh? Aren’t you doing it ’cause you wanna get along with Miss Chastille?”

“I-I don’t really want to get... wait! Why do you—!”

Zagan exchanged looks with Nephy.

Barbatos... you’re more of a wreck than Chastille here...

Selphy replied to the perturbed Barbatos with a carefree smile.

“It’s okay. Mister Barbatos, you’re like, an amazing sorcerer who can even fight with Mister Zagan, right? You can surely fish up a huge one!”

“...Ain’t this area your ocean? Is it fine for sorcerers to damage it?”

“Ahahah, I don’t get all the hard stuff, but if Lilith says it’s okay then it’s A-OK!”

Lilith never said it was alright though...

Moreover, she was being played around with like a toy, but unfortunately her childhood friend didn’t realize any of this.

Are those two really friends...?

But perhaps her carefree words eased the air around Barbatos anyways, and he gripped the fishing rod as if to pull himself together.

“Oi, what’s the biggest thing around here?”

“Let’s see... Oh yeah. Old gramps Archwhale should be around this area.”

“Archwhale...? You mean the king of the ocean?”

Excepting dragons, it was said to be the world’s largest living being. There were also rumors as to whether it was actually a subspecies of ancient dragons.

“Yup. He’s like, the king of all whales. He’s a big ole fish but he can talk, cause tsunamis, and even fly. I got to ride his back when I was a kid, too.”

“A whale ain’t a fish, right...? Actually, is it fine for us to fish up someone you know? We’re feeding that little brat you know?”

Somehow or other, Barbatos was the one who had more common sense between the two of them. However, this was still Barbatos. He had doubts about it, but he wasn’t one to hesitate in the face of doubts. To the contrary, he cast his fishing line into the sea, now overflowing with fighting spirit.

“Hmph, whatever. I’ll fish up that Archwhale or whatever it is!”

“That’s the spirit! Ah, but is fishing, like, something you can pick your target for though?”

“What do you think a sorcerer is? All I gotta do is slam the hook into the place with the most condensed mana. I’ll bring ’em down in one strike!”

Apparently Barbatos was using some impromptu sorcery on his fishing hook to search for signs of mana within the ocean. The hook was changing directions within the water automatically and dove deeper down as if it were swimming.

Huh, that’s a good idea. Should I try it too?

Zagan had yet to catch anything. It peeved him to copy Barbatos, but it really was a good idea. Before long, perhaps having found the Archwhale, Zagan’s undesirable friend put on a convinced sneer.

“Hyahaha, eat shit Archwhale!”

Barbatos let out an evil laugh and swung his fishing rod. As he did, the fishing hook deep within the water vigorously changed directions and certainly did sink into some massive shadow deep within the water.

“...How’s that?”

Maybe there was some resistance? Barbatos’ voice was filled with tension, and immediately following that...

“GRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARGH!”

A tremendous roar broke out, and the surface of the water exploded. The boat Barbatos and Selphy were riding was blown to bits, and the two of them were thrown into the air.

“Oh, that’s not good.”

Barbatos deserved what he got and Zagan didn’t really care about him, but Selphy would probably die if she were to hit the surface of the water with that much force. Zagan secretly stretched out his hand while making sure his own boat would not capsize.

As he quickly wove together a magic circle on the spot, an invisible mass of mana caught Selphy in the air. It was a variation of the sorcery he used to suspend the divine guardian in the air. Barbatos plunged head first into the water, but Selphy touched down relatively softly onto its surface. An enormous wave spread out, and even the boats far away from them were rocking greatly.

“What happened!?”

“It’ll capsize, be careful!”

That being said, basically everybody here was a sorcerer or an Angelic Knight. Nobody would actually capsize from only this much force. After the wave eventually calmed down, ‘something’ was floating in the air above Zagan and the others which was easily the size of the uninhabited island they were visiting. Looking up at it, Nephy let out a trembling voice.

“M-Master Zagan, just what is that...?”

“Hmm. It seems that’s the so-called Archwhale. According to Selphy, it apparently possesses enough intelligence and mana to speak human language.”

Nephy gulped down.

“In other words, that means...”

“Yeah. It can probably use something as simple as sorcery. It’s up there floating in the air, after all.”

The world truly was vast. There was much that Zagan had gained by visiting Liucaon, including knowledge of Liucaon’s Holy Treasures. The being above in the sky seemed to be quite ancient. It had green moss growing thickly on its cranium, and it had six stone-like fins grandly paddling in the air.

Also, blood was pouring out of its forehead like a fountain. Barbatos did in fact get a direct hit with his fishing hook, but...

“Hey, this counts as fishing it up, right?”

Barbatos clenched his fist and made a ruckus, having not learned anything at all from this. Next to him, Selphy, now reverted to her

form as a mermaid, cocked her head to the side.

“Huh? The boat, like, broke, so didn’t we fail?”

Fortunately, perhaps, both Barbatos and Selphy didn’t seem to have any major injuries from being flung in the air and were just chattering in a carefree manner. Unfortunately, there was a certain crybaby who didn’t even notice any of this uproar from being so engrossed in fishing.

“I did it Kuroka! Something finally bit my line!”

“Um, Lady Chastille...? Isn’t there something strange going on here...?”

“Huh? Now that you mention it, the fishing line is going up...?”

After following the fishing line, she found it going splendidly right into the Archwhale’s mouth. It seemed that when it shot up through Barbatos’ boat, it ended up swallowing Chastille’s fishing hook. As for Barbatos, who had actually pierced it with his fishing hook, he was already burying himself in a watery grave.

“Uhhh...?”

The scenery looked just like Chastille was the one who had fished up the Archwhale. It wasn’t clear whether the two girls in the boat were aware of this, but they should have at least understood that what was attached to their fishing rod was a truly ferocious being. Both Chastille and Kuroka’s faces cramped up.

Nevertheless, this girl was one who was strong at the eleventh hour. She regained her composure, stood atop her boat, and made a declaration filled with resolution.

“My name is Chastille Lillqvist. I am sure that you are one who can claim to be a great king of the ocean. It seems that we have committed quite the discourtesy to you, but I would ask that you forgive us.”

Now then, did what she say get conveyed at all? Chastille’s declaration resonated in the skies, and the Archwhale’s gigantic eyes squinted. Gazes filled with hope for the situation to settle down gathered on Chastille. However, it was wrong of them to forget. This girl was an unfortunate wreck without parallel when it came to her private life.

“I’ll have you serve as Foll’s snack right here!”

A hellish silence enveloped the area. It was difficult to gauge a whale’s expressions, but it looked like the whale was trembling from being insulted to such an extent for the first time in hundreds of years. The whale opened its massive mouth, lined with so many teeth they almost looked like hair.

“HYOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!”

A brief howl. Zagan could tell that this was a chant for a spell. A massive magic circle formed at sea level directly below the

Archwhale.

Oh, this is bad. This guy's trying to make a tsunami.

If it were to unleash a tsunami here, the uninhabited island behind them would surely get swallowed away. Even the lives of everyone around them would be smashed to bits just like Barbatos' boat. Nephys seemed to be sensitive to such forms of power.

"Master Zagan!"

"Don't worry. I know."

Zagan immediately prepared to devour the Archwhale's sorcery — but ended up stopping.

Well, to this guy, we just smacked him on the head then disparaged him for no reason at all...

Having said that, he couldn't just let Chastille and his subordinates die, so he decided to just devour half the sorcery. Immediately following that, the Archwhale's sorcery activated, and the ocean became astir. An enormous wave was given form, and all five remaining boats were easily swallowed away.

"WAAAAAA!?"

Screams broke out here and there, then all sound was swallowed by the waves.

Zagan didn't overlook the fact that the Archwhale's eyes shot open in shock.

A wave certainly did break out. It was a big wave that easily capsized all their boats, but it was just a wave. A tsunami was more akin to an avalanche. It didn't just consist of a shockwave, it carried a mass beyond human understanding and swallowed everything away. Compared to that, the wave that was created was nothing but a wet sheet.

I just quietly took it, so satisfy yourself with this.

Zagan tried to communicate that with just his gaze. And perhaps having understood that, the Archwhale didn't weave any more sorcery. It simply sank back into the ocean. Several minutes later, everyone clumsily drifted away back to the uninhabited island.

"A-Are we alive?"

"Th-That... was horrible..."

"Someone! Lilith's like, not breathing here!"

"Keehee, you may leave it to me. It's standard for a sleeping beauty to be awoken by her mistress' kiss is it not?"

"...Miss Gremory, you'll do naught to trouble Master Zagan, right?"

"I won't!"

"Ugh, sorry everyone. It's all because I fished that thing up...!"

"Aah, no, that was kinda my bad..."

Everyone called out to each other in their own way to check on

each others safety. For the time being, everyone was accounted for and uninjured. Zagan felt like he had heard something about Lilith not breathing, but Gremory and Nephy were present so that was probably fine. In any case, regardless of it being an Archwhale, just what were sorcerers and Angelic Knights who were famous across the entire continent doing taking on a single animal all together?

“Pffft, ahahaha!”

As that thought passed his mind, Zagan was unable to suppress his laughter at the absurdity of it all. Nephy curiously tilted her head to the side.

“Master Zagan?”

“I never played around in the water like this even when I was a brat. Hey Barbatos. How long are you going to wear that stuffy looking robe?”

Zagan splashed water at Barbatos as he said that. Although, this was a splash of water from an Archdemon. Barbatos was completely blown away by the sheet of water coming in at him like a bomb blast.

“Th-The hell was that!?”

“You were just sitting around like an idiot is all.”

His unkempt hair looked like dried up seaweed. Several others burst into laughter upon seeing that, yet someone else also splashed water at him.

“Bfwah! Who the hell was that!?”

Taking a closer look, the one scooping up water with both hands was Chastille.

“Hahaha, this is payback!”

Chastille was surely looking for a trigger to make up with him. And Barbatos seemed to have been finally unbound from his troubles, let out a laugh, and started to retaliate.

“Don’t get carried away crybaby! GYAAAAAAH! What the!?”

The moment he tried to splash water back at her, all the Angelic Knights present began their offensive.

“You insolent sorcerer! We shan’t permit you to follow our Lady Chastille around!”

“Isn’t he basically living with her inside her shadows?”

“Kill him!”

“Yes. Understood.”

All the Angelic Knights were yelling violent accusations as they began seriously splashing water at him. Having said that, nobody was wearing Anointed Armor or anything, so none of it possessed enough power to even draw blood. Nevertheless, with enough of them doing it, it was at least hard for him to breathe. And just then, something like a light got mixed in with the water.

“Hey assholes! Who the hell threw a blade at me!?”

“Huh? I did. What of it?”

Kuroka replied to the accusation completely calmly, leaving even all the other Angelic Knights speechless.

Zagan gazed on their tomfoolery, when...

“Hm...? Uh, hmmm?”

Zagan’s face stiffened up.

Huh? Ummm, one, two, three...

Zagan began counting everyone who was present as if doubting his own sanity. Barbatos ended up joining them, so there should have been thirteen people present on this uninhabited island. That was the case, but...

There’s fourteen of us...?

For some reason there was one extra Angelic Knight splashing water at Barbatos. He could tell at a glance that they were new. It was only natural since Zagan knew the faces of everyone he was close to, including the Angelic Knights.

More importantly, what’s ‘that?’

In any case, with their sudden new intruder, Zagan understood that his vacation wouldn’t end peacefully.

Chapter III: All Sorcerers Have Communication Disorders, but Apparently Angelic Knights Are in the Same Boat

Chastille had brought along three regular Angelic Knights including Richard. And before anyone knew it, there was one more than before. Honestly speaking, Zagan didn't really remember the faces of any of the Angelic Knights, but nevertheless, there was suddenly an intruder on the uninhabited island.

That in itself was certainly a problem, but what baffled Zagan was that the intruder showed no signs of trying to hide himself. All Angelic Knights were different in their own way, but this one here was clearly quite frivolous.

I mean, we didn't bring a geezer like that over.

He looked to be in his late thirties. He had many old scars carved into both his arms, and his physique was just a little larger than the other Angelic Knights who were here. Just this much showed that he had been through a fair amount of carnage. It was likely that he was several levels above Richard and the others, or perhaps even beyond Chastille and Raphael in skill.

He was a man who was not supposed to show any negligence, but... for some reason, he was the only Angelic Knight here wearing Anointed Armor. Even from a distance, one could see that sand was getting into all the gaps and was probably quite the irritant.

Moreover, he was standing around in this heat in the middle of the ocean, the ocean water was surely evaporating inside his armor and making quite the smell. The fact that he ignored all this and was having fun splashing water around with the other Angelic Knights made Zagan just want to punch him. As for an even more baffling point than all of the above...

The hell is he even doing...?

It was a face that Zagan recognized. And he was snickering at Zagan saying that he wanted him to quip with a "What the hell are you doing here!?" even as he splashed water on Barbatos. Such was the case, but Zagan simply looked annoyed and didn't say anything.

There was no mistaking that this was someone he knew, but he

didn't want to get involved. And eventually, Chastille finally noticed the abnormality and completely stiffened up.

"Huh...? What? Why...?"

"What's the matter, Lady Chastille?" the new Angelic Knight replied, feigning ignorance.

"What's the matter"? Why are you even here, Lord Michael!?"

The man looked relieved from the bottom of his heart upon hearing that.

"Hngh... As one would expect of the sole woman among the Archangels! Thanks! I've been waiting for someone to say that!"

The fully grown man was nodding his head repeatedly while huffing out his nose. And with that, everyone noticed he was there. The other Angelic Knights all looked startled, and Barbatos and Gremory surrounded him with a keen wariness—though it wasn't clear whether this was because he was an intruder, or whether it was because of his stuffy looking Anointed Armor.

"Who the hell are you? You're not just some ordinary asshole right?"

"Do be careful, Purgatory. Even I couldn't tell when this fellow showed up... Well, I can't even tell the difference between stuffy looking men who don't deserve any love to begin with though."

"Hey, the fomorian sorcerer over there, aren't you being a bit cruel?" the man replied in a pitiful voice, as he then turned to face Zagan. "Or rather, come on Archdemon. You noticed me a good while ago, so why did you just ignore me?"

"Why the hell do I have to play along with your stupid little game of trying to get some attention...?" Zagan declared with even an air of hostility about him, to which the man raised both hands as if surrendering.

"Whoa now, I'm not so dumb that I'd come to pick a fight barehanded with an Archdemon you know?"

"Hmm. Barehanded... huh?"

The man had a sword dangling at his waist. This likely wasn't just some regular sword. And regardless of this fact, Zagan had a thought as to why this man would claim to be unarmed.

The man then stuck his hand into a gap in his Anointed Armor.

"Yup, barehanded, unarmed. All I got on me is this lovely little... huh?"

He pulled out a tin box from his chest pocket, likely a box of tobacco. The moment he pulled it out though, water flowed out of it. Tobacco was a plant grown in a specific region that was rolled up into a leaf and burned as a stimulant to be inhaled. Unlike a pipe, these were disposed of after each use. Zagan had never smoked himself, but the stuff had only begun circulating in markets in the last few decades

and was quite expensive.

“Nooo... they were so expensive...”

The man wailed in grief and looked like he would collapse right there, but he then noticed the gazes filled with contempt around him. He let out a whistle and regained his composure.

“Anyways, don’t get so pissed here. The fact that I’m here is... well, an accident.”

“...An accident?”

As Zagan pressured him and even unleashed his mana, the man let out a laugh and tapped the sword at his waist.

“Before that, I need to introduce myself. I’m Michael Diekmeyer— just as you can see, I’m one of the Archangels. Nice to meet you, Archdemon Zagan.”

He put emphasis on this being their first meeting, and Zagan folded his arms.

Is he telling me to match his story?

Zagan frankly had no obligation to play along with him, but...

“I see. I’ve heard that name before. Archangel Michael Diekmeyer. If I recall, you’re Zachariel’s wielder?”

The pairing of Archangels and the names of their Sacred Swords was something Zagan heard from Raphael. He then carefully made one more addendum.

“Also, setting aside Chief Archangel Ginias Galahad, you’re also referred to as the Strongest Archangel.”

“Haha, how flattering. I’m honored to be recognized by an Archdem— whoa there.”

A dull thud tore the air apart. The sand between Michael and Zagan burst and small screams could be heard here and there.

“Hey now, no need to be such a bully. Most humans will straight up die from a punch from an Archdemon you know?”

“...Hm, seems like that Sacred Sword is the real deal.”

Michael suddenly had a greatsword in hand, a Sacred Sword. Zagan had driven in his fist without any warning at all, and Michael repelled it with his Sacred Sword. Zagan had put the same amount of power in his fist that he would usually hit Barbatos with. Any plain sword would have shattered from it. Seeing that Michael’s sword didn’t break, it was a real Sacred Sword. There were several people present who understood all that at a glance. Barbatos, who usually received that punch to the face, even had sweat going down his brow as he groaned.

“Hey, that guy just repelled Zagan’s fist?”

And he did so easily without making any preparations at all. It was questionable whether ‘work mode’ Chastille could even do so. It gave a glimpse at just why this man was called the strongest. And at

this point, Chastille cut in between them.

“Stop! Please wait Zagan. This is certainly Archangel Michael himself. Moreover, even though he isn’t part of the Unification Faction, he isn’t part of the Warring Faction either... how do I put it, he’s in a clique sitting cleanly in the middle. He’s not an enemy.”

“Hmmm...?”

At the very least, he was trustworthy enough for Chastille to make that declaration. She then turned to face Michael.

“Lord Michael, could you please explain what exactly you are doing here?”

“Huh? Seriously? Didn’t they contact you? I was dispatched here to support you!”

Chastille put her palm to her head.

“So the reinforcements... referred to you...?”

“Damn straight. Those cardinal geezers said I should put in some work once in a while.”

“...Well, I understand that you came to support me, but why are you on this island? How did you get here?”

This was the part that Zagan didn’t get either. And as everyone glared at him, Michael’s shoulders drooped in a crestfallen manner.

“Why? That’s what I wanna ask here. There wasn’t even a storm or anything, but a huge wave suddenly sank my ship, and I barely escaped with my life and got washed up here. Why are all of you here? Did you also get shipwrecked?”

Everyone averted their gaze from his sorrowful complaint.

Did this guy get caught in the Archwhale’s wave?

This man liked to play the dunce so much that it was hard to tell how serious he was. Michael gazed out at the sea in grief as he retold his tale.

“By the time I came to, I was on this island, and as a bonus, I saw all of you having a blast. So I thought maybe I’d start by just joining in on the fun...”

“Just joining in... You just said your ship sank, what about your subordinates and the sailors?”

“Aah, no need to worry ’bout that. I was the only crew. My budget was too small to hire a boat with an actual crew.”

“So you came alone?”

Even Chastille found this rather suspicious. However, the person in question just let out a bold laugh.

“Well yeah. You’re getting mixed up in incidents with an Archdemon and a dragon that even the Archangels can’t do nothing about right? Like hell are we bringing civilians or my subordinates, who all have such bright futures, along.”

The old man winked in a playful manner, leaving Zagan to sigh in

a disconcerted manner.

“That’s some confidence you’ve got.”

The man spoke out of concern for his comrades, and despite declaring that all the other Archangels would just get in the way, he was basically declaring that he would be fine on his own. Zagan then pointed to the opposite end of the beach.

“Then go to Atlastia. We’re in the middle of enjoying a vacation.”

Zagan made no effort to hide his displeasure, and Michael shrugged his shoulders.

“Oh come on, nobody will be bothered if you just shelter this poor, shipwrecked old man for just a bit, right?”

“It bothers me. Get lost already.”

There’s no way Nephy and the others could relax with such a strange old man hanging around. Zagan’s words were now even filled with killing intent, leaving Michael to just nod back reluctantly.

“Fine, fine. I get it. Work is work... Well, it’s a little weird of me to ask this, but... I’ve got a request.”

“...What?”

Michael looked greatly perplexed, then pointed to the sea with both his index fingers.

“A small one’s fine, but do you got a boat I can borrow?”

“...”

Zagan held back his urge to just tell Michael to swim and let out a sigh.

“Hey Lilith. Wake up already.”

Lilith was still unconscious on the beach despite all the uproar going on. Gremory and the others were at least nursing her, so there wasn’t any risk to her life. Upon being called to by Zagan, she finally woke up and shook off her head.

“Uugh...? W-Wake up...? Huh? Who’s this?”

Lilith was still half-awake trying to get to grips with what was going on, as Zagan just arbitrarily gave her orders.

“He’s just a victim. We’re sending him away, so lend him a boat.”

“The boats we used earlier were all we had, though.”

Zagan looked at the scattered pieces of wood spread across the beach. Even with sorcery it would be difficult to restore them into a usable shape with all the missing pieces out there. The sorcerers gathered here didn’t really specialize in such sorcery too. With this, it looked like the fishing contest ended in a draw.

“It can’t be helped. Lend him the boat we used to get here... huh?”

Zagan turned to look at the wharf, but the boat that was supposed to be there had vanished. It wasn’t all that big, but it was enough to fit a dozen people and store plenty of food and luggage.

No way, did it get swept away by that wave?

Lilith scrubbed her eyes like she couldn't believe the reality before her, then turned completely pale. She then stiffly turned towards Zagan.

"Um, Your Highness, how're we supposed to get back?"

And so, their fun vacation transformed into a life of survival on an uninhabited island.



Anyways, are these guys alright?

Zagan was secretly following behind Lilith and Kuroka. Behind him was Nephy, Nephteros, and Foll. Fortunately, because they were in a forest, there were no signs that they had been noticed yet. It was possible that Kuroka could sense them, but with all the wildlife in the forest it would be difficult. She might have a sense of something being out of place, but it wouldn't be clear what it was. The two of them didn't show any particular signs of awkwardness about them.

This might have been fairly natural since Zagan didn't notice anything awkward about Kuroka until Gremory pointed it out. He had no clue at all what Kuroka was worried about.

The matter with Raphael should have already been resolved...

However, people had many worries over the course of their lives. Zagan groaned over this fact as Nephy muttered to him curiously.

"Master Zagan, did something happen between Miss Lilith and Miss Kuroka?"

"I don't know either, but according to Gremory, Kuroka is worried about something. And that's been weighing on Lilith's mind."

Nephteros came to an understanding and nodded in return.

"Now that I think of it, that girl always keeps a step back from those around her."

"Hmm... It's not like she's dragging out her original dispute with Chastille right?"

"I wonder... There are times she treats Chastille like a stranger too, so it isn't entirely out of the question..."

"...Seriously. Why do I have to keep a watch over all this crap..."

"Isn't this just the same as usual for you, Big Bro?"

"...."

Zagan was left stumped that even his sister-in-law saw him in that light. Foll then muttered out upon suddenly remembering something.

"That tabaxi girl was scared of touching Zagan's face."

It happened when they were reunited in Atlastia. Since Zagan had turned into a child due to the curse, he made her touch his face so that things could be explained more quickly, but Kuroka seemed to be abnormally flustered by that act.

"You're right... But what does that mean?"

Zagan did in fact get stabbed by her quite seriously when he came to stop her rampage. It was possible that she had feelings of guilt over that. Zagan racked his brain over what it could possibly be as Nephy continued to pry into it as well.

“That girl was part of an assassination group called Azazel, right?”

“Yeah. She uses a Holy Treasure and can fight on level with Chastille. So you can almost call her a thirteenth wielder of a Sacred Sword.”

Zagan answered, and Nephy put her hand to her chest as she nodded.

“Then, I feel like I understand,” Nephy said, then continued as if confessing her own crimes, “Isn’t this because she killed someone completely out of malice?”

Zagan’s eyes shot open.

Nephy once worried about how she had allowed her entire village to be massacred.

She no longer displayed such worries outwardly, but there was surely no way she had forgotten about it.

“Revenge feels great the moment it happens. But after that, it brings up an extreme sense of self-hate. ‘Aah, I’ve dirtied my own hands... is it fine for me to make Master Zagan’s meals with such hands?’ Even I have had such worries before.”

With that, Zagan finally came to an understanding as well.

“My hands... are dirty... so touching someone’s face is a little...”

There was no way she didn’t kill any sorcerers during her tenure as a church assassin. Her hands had murdered others out of hatred, so she was scared of touching others with them.

You can’t even tell what people’s faces are like if you don’t touch them, right...?

Even Zagan knew that the blind could perceive the faces of others by using the sense of touch in their fingers. And yet, this girl cast away that means of doing so due to feelings of guilt. There was surely nothing more uneasy than interacting with others whose faces were a complete mystery to her.

“...What a foolish girl. There isn’t anyone around you that would even care about that...” Nephteros added.

Chastille was the one to take her in. Just who would blame her for the sins of an assassin?

“Seriously, it’s completely foolish. There’s no point in caring about the life and death of complete strangers.”

Zagan had killed plenty of people too. That was precisely the kind of people sorcerers were to begin with. Even now, Zagan would kill anyone who got in his way as if it were nothing. He only held it back a little because he felt like Nephy would be disgusted with him if he

just went about meaninglessly slaughtering people. There was also the fact that lately it was more convenient to let them all live to fulfill his goals.

As a result, he hadn't killed anyone for some time now, but it would somewhat be correct to say that that was because the guys he punched with the intent of killing them just wouldn't die. That's precisely why Zagan could say this.

"However, the only ones who could just disregard it entirely are surely sorcerers like us. It's far more pure to be worried about it. A truly and utterly foolish worry."

Nephy stared at Zagan in surprise, then leaned in on his shoulder.

"The only one who could declare such a worry as foolish would be you, Master Zagan..."

I never would have thought this way before meeting you, you know?

Those words crept up all the way to Zagan's throat, but wouldn't make it out his mouth. Instead, he shrugged his shoulders.

"However, even if we were the ones to tell Kuroka that, it would never reach her. Even Raphael likely wouldn't work."

The only one who could get that through to her was someone who had passed their time with her, who had tasted the same pain as her. And at the same time as that thought came to mind, Zagan suddenly felt that it wasn't quite the case either.

No, it might not actually be all that complicated.

Once in a while, there were idiots in this world who wouldn't see truth as the truth, who would kick aside reason without hesitation and unconditionally think of others. Back in Nephteros' case, this was Chastille. Surely there was someone suitable to do this for Kuroka. And as if affirming that entirely, a voice rang out in the area.

"You dummy! I was really saved when I found out that you were alive you know!? So why can you even say that!?"

They couldn't tell what the two were talking about, but Lilith screamed out in tears as she hugged Kuroka. Kuroka looked bewildered for a moment, but eventually hugged Lilith back as if giving up.



“P-Please don’t cry, Lilith. I’m properly alive here. It’s not like I’m thinking that I should die... Hey, please? If you cry so much, even I’ll...”

Watching that play out, Zagan and the others pulled back little.

“Seems it was needless anxiety on our part.”

“Master Zagan, looks like your judgment here was correct.”

“Like I know. Lilith just decided this on her own.”

“Despite all that, Big Bro, you look happy,” Nephteros commented curiously.

“Shut it. You lot go look for food already!”

“Okaaaay.”

Nephteros and Foll left as they giggled.

“Seriously...”

And although he said that, Zagan thought to himself, *I may just be blessed with good subordinates...*

The thought that people could save others was arrogant and ridiculous. Nevertheless, if there was someone out there who believed that they were saved, then it just meant there was inevitably someone who had saved them. Such things were pretty much a form of coincidence, nothing more than a miracle. It wasn’t something that could be brought about by desire. And back when Zagan scornfully laughed about such a thought, this was what Archdemon Orias told him.

“I believe that someone who knows that yet doesn’t give up and lends a hand to others, is precisely one who is capable of saving others.”

He didn’t believe that to be a joke. But even so, *It’s a good thing if Kuroka is saved by this...*

Leaving behind the two girls crying in each other’s arms, Zagan certainly smiled in relief.



“Er, crap. We reached the sea.”

Deciding that constantly watching over the two girls crying would be far too boorish, Zagan and Nephy went back into the forest, but there was no path to follow. They ended up coming up to the shore as they wandered through it. The two of them didn’t manage to scavenge up much food. The reason for this was largely because they were munching on the fruits they found along the way.

“Master Zagan, you never even considered winning yourself right?” Nephy remarked with a giggle.

“Well, it’s just that sort of occasion. It’s the duty of one who aims to be a king to offer rewards during such frivolous games.”

Zagan spurred on those around him with rewards during the

fishing contest and the current food gathering contest and had no intention of winning himself. The primary reason for these contests was naturally to abate Foll's hunger, but he did also want to reward his subordinates and Chastille's group for going along with him to the bottom of the ocean for over half a month. Snatching the reward for himself would just be counterproductive.

Having now come out to a spot with a good view of his surroundings, Zagan turned around.

"...So, what do you want?"

And as he asked that, a stuffy-looking man came out of the forest.

"Haha, I didn't mean to get in between you two here ya know?"

"So it was out of consideration? I don't keep any secrets from Nephy. If you have something to say, get it over with quickly."

There were things he hadn't told her about yet, but one day he would do so. If she asked him about them, he would answer right away too.

Michael shrugged his shoulders.

"Okay then, I'll cut right to the chase... One of the thirteen Archdemons, Andrealphus was killed."

"Huh...!?"

Nephy gulped down. They had come into conflict with two Archdemons already in Bifrons and Orias, but both of them were eerie sorcerers whose powers seemed bottomless. A large reason Zagan was able to overpower them was because of his power to devour sorcery. This power was the source of his second name Sorcerer Slayer, and without it, he surely wouldn't be able to get out of a fight with another Archdemon safely. This was shocking news, but Zagan's reaction was still completely cool-headed.

"Hmmm."

"Huh, you don't believe me?"

"I do. I was planning to kill him one day anyways."

Zagan didn't even know how Michael was expecting him to react to such news.

"You were planning to kill him...? Well, whatever. It's stupid to try and preach morals to a sorcerer, huh?" Michael replied as he scratched his head in a troubled manner.

"So? You surely didn't come all the way to this uninhabited island just to report that to me right?"

"...You've really got no charm here buddy..." Michael muttered with a sour look. "The one who did it is a sorcerer called Decarabia." Zagan didn't recognize that name.

Not that sorcerers always go by the same name all the time anyways.

There were even cases like Zagan's where he didn't actually know his original name.

“Hm... I don't know that name. What kind of sorcerer is he?”

“Seems he was Andrealphus' disciple. And just as you'd expect from a disciple of an Archdemon, he was one of the biggest contenders for succeeding Marchosias after his death. The thing is...” Michael put on a bitter smile and began slapping his own head. “Apparently that guy's got a whole lotta screws loose in his head. So they didn't accept him as an Archdemon.”

“Hm? Then why did he wait so long to kill him?”

If he were holding a grudge for not being selected, his actions were half a year late. Michael shrugged his shoulders.

“Who knows? It might just be something trivial like he'd gotten out of his hole in the ground for the first time in a while and was throwing a tantrum or something right? Seems nobody can guess what that guy is thinking at all.” Michael then clapped his hands as he recalled something. “Oh yeah. Apparently Decarabia gave himself a name — Archdemon Slayer.”

“That's quite the tall claim.” Zagan replied with a strained smile.

Even among the many countermeasures Zagan devised against the other Archdemons, he hadn't really found a reliable way of killing them yet. And now someone was calling themselves an Archdemon Slayer. It was hard to believe. However, there were several facts that Zagan could grasp from that.

“I see. The fact that you're telling me this is because he plans on challenging me next, right?”

Nephy trembled with a start.

“Master Zagan...”

“Fear not, Nephy. If he truly did kill another Archdemon, it is something worth celebrating over. He's going out of his way to come here and show me that method, after all.”

“You're acting awfully composed, but it's not my fault if you get tripped up here 'kay?” Michael commented in astonishment.

“I already told you. I plan on annihilating the twelve other Archdemons. If there is a means of killing them, it only stands to reason that such a means would be pointed at me as well. A king who falters over something so trivial cannot defeat the Archdemons.” Zagan then glared at Michael. “Setting that aside, are you lot from the church planning on having me and that Archdemon Slayer or whatever collide and hoping for two open seats among the Archdemons?”

“Hah? Well, those cardinal geezers are probably hoping for that.”

“And you're implying that you're different.”

Michael put on a bitter smile.

“I don't get what you're planning at all, but the Archdemon known as Zagan is already an existence that heavily influences that

balance between the church and sorcerers. If you kick the bucket here, the church will take heart in their plan to wipe out the sorcerers. And what do you think will happen then?"

"Sounds like the church is having fun."

"Those guys who only think by the numbers probably are. But not me. People will start getting killed all over, and my workload as an Archangel will only go up. I'm a fundamentally lazy man. I'd rather not have the peaceful balance we have now collapsing."

It certainly was true that this man looked lazy.

A lazy man would pick the easy path of pretending to be a friend and cutting someone down from behind too.

Zagan was fine with believing Michael here, but he didn't trust him. He nodded without allowing his vigilance to waver.

"Very well. You can look forward to me finishing him off."

"Oh? You really do catch on quick don't cha?"

"If he's coming here, he probably has a boat too. With that, I can send you on your way." Zagan replied with a dead-serious air about him, leaving Michael completely taken aback.

"...W-Well, that's all I had to say."

Michael left with a completely worn out expression on his face. Nephy then shyly wrapped her hand around Zagan's pinky finger as if unable to bear her anxieties about the situation.

"Master Zagan..."

"I'm telling you there's nothing to fear."

Zagan gently brushed Nephy's cheek, and Nephy leaned in against him, letting the strength out of her shoulders. She then tilted her head to the side.

"Um, is Lord Michael perhaps an acquaintance of yours, Master Zagan? The two of you don't quite seem to be friends... but you also look to be somewhat close."

"Hmm... how do I even explain it...? We're not close, but we're acquainted. In any case, he isn't someone I got involved with because I wanted to."

A lot of things would actually be easier if I just offed him right here too.

However, Zagan was currently in the middle of an enjoyable vacation, as were his subordinates and Chastille's group. If he exposed Michael's identity, then everybody's fun would surely come to an end. That's why he didn't do anything. He could only provide a vague answer even to Nephy. He didn't know whether his intent was conveyed to her, but Nephy's pointy ears quivered as she nodded.

"I see. All is as you will, Master Zagan."

And then, just as they began walking side by side, Nephy's ears twitched.

“What’s wrong?”

“...? Master Zagan, do you hear something?”

“Hm...? I don’t really hear anything.”

Zagan sharpened his hearing with sorcery. He could hear the voices of the Angelic Knights, Barbatos and the others running about as they gathered food, but he didn’t hear anything suspicious in the area.

But, Nephy’s the one saying this.

It could be something like the voice of a spirit that Zagan was unable to hear. He just received a warning from Michael. There was a possibility that their troublesome guest was already here.

“What does it sound like?” Zagan asked as he put himself on guard.

“A... voice...!?” Nephy cupped her ears with her hands, then gulped down. “This is bad! Master Zagan, the voice is pleading for help!”

“Ugh...”

It was possible that one member of their group had gotten injured or something. However, it was strange that Zagan couldn’t hear them if that were the case. So for the time being, he had Nephy lead him to the voice. After passing over the beach, they eventually arrived at an inlet that led into a dark cave. And after coming this far, Zagan realized just who the owner of the voice was.

“That’s... Alshiera?”

The vampire who had once antagonized him was sprawled across the floor.



This girl looked the same as the last time he saw her, but also completely different. Her black and frilly dress was in complete tatters, and her golden hair was totally disheveled from being in the ocean water. A pair of sharp fangs could be seen from her slightly open mouth. The girl laying down in the cave was so quiet it was questionable if she was even breathing — though she was undead to begin with — and showed no signs of the slightest movement. Nevertheless, she was still obstinately gripping onto her stuffed teddy bear covered in creepy stitches.

Did she fight someone... Michael? No, doesn’t look like this happened recently.

It appeared that she had been laying in this cave for quite some time, as her body was somewhat buried in sand up to about ankle height. This was likely an effect of the tide carrying the sand in. Moreover, it didn’t look like she was wounded by a sword.

“Is she... dead...?” Nephy said with a gulp.

“No, she’s undead to begin with. She wasn’t alive in the first place. However, the fact that her body is present means that she’s still here. But...”

Zagan fell silent.

She’s already a goner like this. She’s just waiting to disappear.

The undead possessed no concept known as ‘death’, but they would vanish if they were to lose their vessel. It would likely take anywhere from tens to hundreds of years for them to reappear in the world. However, Nephy was one who couldn’t ignore her even if she wasn’t a living being.

“Please hang on.”

Nephy held Alshiera up and put her atop her lap gently as if she were a doll about to break into pieces at any moment. She then swept away the sand that was covering Alshiera and put her hand to her brow. And yet, Nephy’s face stiffened up.

“I can’t heal her? Why...?”

“Mysticism probably doesn’t work on her. I told you before, the Night Clan exists outside of the realm of life and death. The source of mysticism is based on an existence which governs over the cycle of life and the spirit, so it’s a power in almost direct opposition to them. That’s why they can’t intervene with each other.”

Celestial mysticism might have had an effect, but Zagan didn’t fully understand its structure and was hesitant to have her try it.

“Ugh...”

Mysticism had no effect, but Alshiera let out a small groan from being supported.

“My dear... brother...”

Unexpectedly, that was the first thing to leak out of her lips.

I don’t know what era it was, but I guess even she had family, huh?

Becoming an undead was, in a sense, the same as severing oneself from the world. It meant that one no longer shared the concept of lifespans with others, after all. In that sense, sorcerers were somewhat similar, but nevertheless, it was unexpected for such words to spill from her lips.

Despite being of the Night Clan, you sure have some humanity left in you, huh?

Zagan couldn’t really speak about others in this sense, but there was nobody here to point that out to him.

“Master Zagan...”

Nephy pleaded him to save Alshiera with her eyes, and Zagan let out a helpless sigh.

It would actually be more convenient for me if she just up and vanished here though...

Nephy didn’t seem to think she was a villain, but Zagan believed

Alshiera was the one to make Foll go berserk. It was Zagan's policy to eliminate all those who inflicted harm on himself and those around him.

"But, I guess I also want to interrogate her about what her objective is."

Muttering that out, Zagan suddenly cut his own wrist using mana, and blood came pouring out.

"M-Master Zagan!?"

"People call them vampires for a reason. They're able to preserve their existence in the world by absorbing life from the blood of others. The only way to save her here is to feed her blood."

Life held a different meaning for them. By stealing the power of life from other beings, they were able to preserve their existence in the world. It would be more correct to state that it was the medium by which they were extending the time limit of their existence. The undead required neither air nor food after all.

Having said that, Zagan hated the idea of using Nephy's blood. No matter the method he used, it would require him to wound her to draw out blood, and that would be accompanied by pain. Using an Archdemon's blood here was truly a luxurious medium. She would surely gain several hundred times the power that she would from a normal human.

Seems there's a saying in Liucaon to 'show humanity even to one's enemy,' but this is somewhat like giving a full course of the world's finest cooking.

Zagan brought his wrist up to Alshiera's mouth and let his blood flow down her throat.

"Mm... Ah... Haa..."

Alshiera's eyes opened as she gasped and clung to Zagan's wrist as if coveting what he was offering her.



“Hey, no biting.”

She began to bare her fangs, but Zagan quickly stuck his finger into her mouth.

“Hak..? Mmm...”

No longer able to close her mouth, blood began smoothly pouring in, and Alshiera’s body began twitching with energy. Even with her eyes on the verge of tears, she was surely no longer able to suppress her urge for blood. She desperately stuck out her tongue to satiate her thirst with Zagan’s blood. Her red tongue traced along Zagan’s wound, making his face feel hot from the pain and ticklish sensation mixing together.

It somehow feels like I’m doing something lewd here...

Nephy was also embarrassed from watching this happen and was covering her face with both hands... Although, she was watching quite intently through the gap in her fingers. Before long, Zagan saw that the strength in Alshiera’s arms which were clinging to him had returned, and he pushed her face back down forcefully.

“That’s enough, right? Let go already.”

“Ah... Hah... Ack, hrk...”

Alshiera broke into a coughing fit and collapsed onto her back. She was choking, but it looked like the treatment had worked. She would surely be back on her feet in no time. For the time being, her life — though that term might not actually be correct — was preserved.

“Master Zagan.”

He wanted to begin interrogating her right away, but it didn’t look like Alshiera would be able to speak for a while longer. Nephy completely ignored her own hands getting stained, pinned down the wound on Zagan’s wrist, and began casting her mysticism to heal him immediately.

Well, Zagan was capable of regenerating from this level of wound instantly himself, but here his bride was doing her best to heal him, so he simply kept quiet and let her do it.

“My apologies. All because I spoke out of turn...”

“It’s not something for you to apologize for, Nephy. I don’t have a reason to save her, but she also isn’t so harmful a being that I need to kill her.”

Nephy smiled in a somewhat troubled manner.

“I should have known that you would say that, Master Zagan.”

“Erk...”

He didn’t want to think of it too much, but it was true that Zagan’s behavior strongly trended towards saving those that he didn’t have a need to kill.

I think it's laughable for a sorcerer to be out saving people though...

And even if he saved them, it wasn't like they always thanked... no, lately he even felt like the people he saved had all been thanking him too.

Things have really changed too much in the last few months somehow...

It was perhaps perfectly obvious after meeting the love of his life. And as those thoughts ran through Zagan's mind, Nephy was staring intently at Zagan's hand. Her treatment should have been long over by now already.

"Nephy. I'm fine now?"

It didn't seem like Nephy heard his voice, as she continued to stare at his hand without moving. His hand was still stained in blood, so he didn't think it was something very pleasant to look at. Nevertheless, after staring fixedly at his hand for a while longer...

"Nom!"

Nephy inexplicably bit down on Zagan's finger. Having said that, she was being careful not to stick her teeth out, so it was more like she was sucking on his finger than biting it.

"N-N-N-N-N-Nephy? What are you doing?"

As one would expect, after Zagan let out a completely bewildered voice, Nephy was brought back to her senses, and she separated her now dark red lips from his hand.

"M-My apologies. I wasn't thinking..."

How do you suck someone's finger without thinking?

Zagan had yet to wash his hand so it was still dirty too. After calming down his thumping heart, Zagan timidly pressed her for further answers.

"Wh-What's wrong with you? Did something happen? Are you sick?"

At the very least, Nephy would normally never do this. Nephy was only capable of covering her face with both hands in embarrassment, implying that he had no idea herself. But even so, she timidly opened her mouth to speak.

"I-I'm not. I didn't mean to..."

"Mmm. I-I get it. I get it, okay?"

Zagan didn't understand any of it at all, but he nodded his head up and down repeatedly anyways. Nephy then replied in a voice that sounded like she would die from shame.

"Um, when I saw Miss Alshiera licking your hand Master Zagan, I felt some sort of difficult to explain sense of extreme vexation... even though I was the one who asked you to save her..."

Zagan took a deep breath and tried to put his thoughts in order.

Ummm, in other words... she's jealous? Wow, that's so cute.

Well, it was true that Zagan also felt somewhat weird while Alshiera was licking his hand. That just meant that Nephy felt the same way as he did.

“A-Anyways, let me clean off the blood, Nephy.”

Blood had even gotten on Nephy’s face when she sucked his finger. Zagan tried to hide his embarrassment by washing it off with water, and cleanly removed all traces of blood. Nephy’s face turned so red as she hung her head down that it felt like she would burst into flames.

“I’m really, really sorry. I wasn’t thinking straight.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

With that, Zagan stuck his hand out in front of Nephy’s face.

“Huh? Um, Master Zagan...?”

“It’s also my fault for hindering you. You may continue.”

It actually felt kind of good too...

Zagan never thought that Nephy would get jealous like that, and he wanted to see more of it.

“B-But... but...”

“It’s alright. All the blood’s been washed away, so do as you like, Nephy.”

She was likely having difficulty in refusing him having just sucked on his finger moments ago. Not that Nephy had ever turned down Zagan’s ridiculous requests before. Zagan stared into her azure eyes which were shaking about in confusion, as a small laugh rang in the air.

“You shouldn’t tease a maiden too much, Silver-Eyed King.”

It was Alshiera. She finally woke up, and was sitting up against the wall of the cave with a smile plastered on her face.

Tch, I forgot she was here...

She really was a hindrance.

Alshiera still looked considerably exhausted, but brought her hand to her mouth and laughed regardless.

“Perhaps I need to offer you my thanks, Silver-Eyed King.”

“I don’t need it. You damned undead don’t even possess the concept of death to begin with, there’s no such thing as saving you lot.”

Alshiera opened her eyes wide with a vexed look upon being pushed back like that.

“Oh my, ‘death’ exists even for we members of the Night Clan. If not for that, this world would be overflowing with us, and we wouldn’t have been exterminated by the church,” Alshiera said, then pointed at her chest and continued. “All members of the Night Clan were originally living beings. Even if our vessels are immortal, the soul has a lifespan. Once our souls stop flowing, it’s nothing more than

a still body of water.”

“Hmph. You’re awfully talkative today.”

“That’s just how dangerous a situation it was. I completely planned to just quietly vanish, but to think I would meet the Silver-Eyed King once more...”

“I’m totally suspicious that this is all an elaborate setup of yours.”

“Heeheehee, yes, that may in fact be the case, Silver-Eyed King.”

Her figure had none of the eeriness it had before, and looked thoroughly frail.

It may be true that she didn’t have much hope.

Zagan then pointed to Nephy.

“If you’re going to give your thanks, then give it to Nephy. I had no intentions of saving your damn life myself.”

“Yes, I’m very well aware. And yet, you saved me anyway. That part of you really hasn’t changed... and, neither have you.”

This girl seemed to impose the ‘Silver-Eyed King’ or whoever on top of Zagan whenever she spoke to him. However this time, she was talking to Nephy in the same manner. He truly didn’t believe that they were previously acquainted, but even so, he was just a little interested in what this girl saw, and what exactly she was imposing on top of them.

Zagan looked down at Alshiera as he addressed her.

“Now then, there’s a mountain of questions I have for you. I did save you here. I’ll have you answer me now.”

“Heehee, oh my, how troublesome. A lady’s secrets are her most charming ornaments, and here you want to unveil them.”

“I don’t have time to keep you and your damned jokes company here.”

He was so close to building a terrific atmosphere with Nephy just moments ago.

At this rate, I feel like we’ll be able to even properly kiss soon!

All these matters with Alshiera and that Decarabia that Michael talked about were simple trifles compared to that. That’s why Zagan pressured her for answers.

“What the hell is your goal? What did you do to Foll back then? And who the hell did this to you? Answer me.”

“Heehee, even if you ask all that at once, I can’t answer you. Having said that, I can’t exactly refuse my Silver-Eyed King after being put in debt to you now can I? What to do?”

Alshiera laughed in an aloof manner, however, her hands that were wrapped around her teddy bear tightly looked to be trembling.

What’s with her? Is she scared? Despite being of the Night Clan?

Nephy also seemed to have realized this, and tugged on Zagan’s sleeve.

“Master Zagan, Miss Alshiera is injured. I’ll feel sorry for her if you pressure her so strongly like that.”

“Erk...”

After being told that, Zagan did feel like he was pushing things too far and groaned. And for some reason Alshiera looked up at the two of them nostalgically.

“You two truly are as intimate as always. I’m just a little jealous.”

Despite being jealous, her gaze was strangely calm.

I’ve seen these eyes before... Oh yeah, this is how Orias looks at Nephy.

Would that make this the gaze of a mother looking over her children? This was completely unfamiliar to Zagan, but it definitely didn’t have a hint of malice within it.

Alshiera then stuck up a single finger.

“Then, how about this? Just one. I will honestly answer just one question of yours, Silver-Eyed King.”

“Do you think you’re in a position to negotiate?”

“This is not a negotiation, it’s a request. The Silver-Eyed King that I know is one who cannot deny the requests of the weak, a man with boundless compassion.”

“You really are impudent...”

Just how could a vampire-like her even claim to be weak after surviving a strike from Foll who had transformed into an adult? She was so impudent it made him suspicious whether her trembling moments ago was just an act.

Well, I guess being this aloof is what I should expect from the Night Clan, huh...?

Even though she was so weak that it took some time for her to even begin talking, she was bold enough to negotiate with him to this extent, and that he could respect.

“Well, fine. However, now that you’ve committed to that, I will not permit any lies or deceit. Surely you aren’t foolish enough that you don’t know the meaning of this, right?”

Just because death didn’t exist to the Night Clan, it didn’t mean that there was no means of inflicting pain on them. It seemed that this was the specialty of the previous owner of Zagan’s castle. Having stolen all of that sorcerer’s knowledge, he at least knew of the means to do the same. He simply didn’t want to rush into such means in front of Nephy, it didn’t mean that he couldn’t. If she were to betray him here, it was more than enough reason for him to take action.

Alshiera simply returned a defiant laugh.

“I am fully aware. I am also aware that the Silver-Eyed King is one who would ask a question that cuts straight to the core of all matters.”

She was being provocative to the very end.

But, it certainly is difficult to ask a question that will get all the answers I want.

Zagan only had a grasp of a small fragment of information when it came to Alshiera's goal, what she fought against, what she knew, and what was going on right now. He couldn't see the connections between everything at all. It was far easier to just believe that she caused the previous incident out of simple whim than to see the threads binding everything together.

In that case, is it better to ask about her past?

And with that thought, a certain word suddenly came to mind.

"Hmph. Then answer me this, Alshiera."

"Please, ask whatever you will."

Zagan gazed directly at Alshiera, implying that he would allow no escape.

"What exactly is Azazel?"

And with that single word, Alshiera's expression froze over entirely. Her face expressed anger, unease, grief, and despair. Or perhaps, this was her true face to begin with. That was just how shaken she was. Alshiera then tightly squeezed on her teddy bear as she cast down her gaze.

"That's... quite troublesome. To think that you would ask this of all things. As expected of the Silver-Eyed King, you possess magnificent insight."

It seemed that he picked the right question.

"Enough of that, answer me."

Zagan urged her on, but Alshiera shook her head.

"...I cannot... answer you."

"Hey. Are you screwing with me?"

Zagan got on board with Alshiera's offer. The fact that she was reneging that offer meant that she was ignoring a contract with an Archdemon. If she truly believed that Zagan was just a big softy, then all that was left for him to do was make her curse herself for being so foolish. Be it a member of the Night Clan or the undead or whatever, an Archdemon would retaliate against them fittingly. Such was the case, but Alshiera's eyes didn't show a hint of ignorance, they looked like those of one who was prepared to die.

"It's not 'I won't answer,' or 'I don't want to answer.' I cannot answer you."

Alshiera gazed right into Zagan's eyes as if saying that was the most she could possibly say.

Hmm. Which means I should think that fact over?

Alshiera would surely not mutter such nonsense if she was hoping that it would work as a way of backing out on her promise. In other words, there was a reason that she couldn't speak of it. It could be

that revealing the secret would trouble someone else, or that it posed an immediate threat to her own being, but it felt like it was a matter on an entirely different level too.

But, it really is strange that I've investigated it so much and still haven't found out what Azazel refers to at all.

Zagan conjectured that it referred to the name of a thirteenth Sacred Sword based on the journal he had found in the elven hidden village. However, there was no thirteenth sword in the church, but there was an organization which used that name. And yet, Alshiera used the name as if referring to a person. Zagan then muttered out as if trying to organize his thoughts.

"Is this related to the reason why despite being used as a name for an organization within the church, it isn't recognized as a Sacred Sword?"

"..."

Alshiera didn't answer.

So this is another question she 'cannot answer.'

Even Zagan would have never found out about the name if he hadn't seen it in the journal he found in the elven hidden village. If he only knew of it as the dark side of the church, he wouldn't have paid it any attention at all.

Wait, maybe that's exactly why?

Just perhaps, even the church was in the same situation as Zagan in that they didn't know what that name implied. He didn't think it was the case, but for an organization like the church which continuously recorded all of their history in scriptures, what exactly would happen if something wasn't recorded? In other words, it wasn't that they didn't recognize the Sacred Sword, it's that they didn't know about it.

Does that mean it's just been that thoroughly erased from all record books in the world?

In that case, he could begin to understand why Alshiera 'could not answer' him here. In any case, it didn't seem he would be able to get an answer out of her no matter how much he interrogated her. And after deliberating over that for a moment longer, Zagan changed his question.

"Then, what should I do to learn about it?"

"Huh...!?" Alshiera's body shook with a start.

"Hmm. So that you can answer."

"...Do you really have to know?"

Zagan felt like this wasn't a problem he could avoid getting involved with just by knowing nothing about it. In that case, there was a need for him to acquire knowledge about it before he got involved. Zagan nodded, and Alshiera let out a sigh as if enduring her

frustration. She then replied in a pleading manner.

"Please do not chase after it... you have no intention of heeding this request, right?"

"A foolish question."

"...Under...stood." Alshiera paused, then began explaining as if confessing her sins. "All you need do is follow in a certain man's footsteps. His life could be said to be a battle centered around that, after all."

"A certain man...? Who is it?"

"Now then, I wonder how he named himself before the Silver-Eyed King? But I do believe you should have met him already."

"...? Is he someone I know?"

Having said that, Zagan's range of acquaintances was quite narrow. Those that he could claim to truly know could be easily counted, but from the way Alshiera was speaking, it sounded like she was referring to a sorcerer. Alshiera shut her eyes and searched her memories, then spoke his name.

"Marc... I'm sure that he would use that name if he were before you."

Zagan's face stiffened upon hearing that name.

Why is his name being brought up here?

It was the name of the boy who acted like a bigger brother to Zagan back in his days as a waif. However, he was still just someone Zagan knew in passing that he remembered for the first time in a while because of the tomfoolery earlier with Gremory and Barbatos.

Seeing Zagan's reaction, Alshiera smiled sadly.

"I see... so you really have met him..."

"What's going on!? What does he have to do with this!?"

Alshiera shook her head.

"I'm sure... he was just a normal boy when he was before you. That man likely wanted you to think that and just forget him with the passage of time."

"You're not answering me!"

"Master Zagan! Please calm down!"

As Zagan began raising his voice more and more, Nephy clung to his arm as if unable to watch any more of it. He could feel the rapid thumping of her heart, causing him to shut his mouth. And as she watched that, Alshiera stuck out the teddy bear in her arms. Apparently there was a pocket on its back, where she took something out of it.

"I've warned you. You're already following the path behind that man. Everything that happened... that dragon girl getting cursed, the meeting with two Archdemons, the acquisition of a Sacred Sword, and likely, everything that will happen from now... follows that path."

Alshiera pushed something into Zagan's hand as she spoke. "But, as long as you do not yet understand the meaning to that, you can surely still back out. You'll be able to enjoy the happiness that you have attained. So please, do not chase this secret any more."

After separating her hands from his, Alshiera's body began crumbling away.

"Hey wait! What do you mean by following his path!? Answer me!"

Zagan's cry was all in vain, and Alshiera's body broke down into a countless number of bats and vanished. Opening his hand, he found a single pair of large, round glasses. They were the ones that boy in his memories wore. The frame was covered in rust, and the lenses were cracked. Just how did they enter Alshiera's possession? And what exactly happened to that boy?

"Master Zagan..."

As Nephy called out to him in a worried voice, Zagan shook his head.

"...I'm alright. I was just a little shocked to hear a familiar name there."

Back out?

Was she telling him that proceeding down this path would expose Nephy to danger? Regardless, Zagan shook his head.

If that is fate, then no matter where I run to, I will crash into this problem one day.

At the very least, that's how Zagan's life had been until now. But even so...

"Did I meet Alshiera somewhere before...?"

He didn't have any memories of such an encounter. However, those known as sorcerers were nothing but liars. It wasn't all that surprising that someone you met before was someone else entirely when you met them again. And just as Zagan looked up to the sky with that discomforting feeling in his chest that wouldn't go away...

"GYAHAHAHA! ZAGAN! Found ya!"

A man came crashing down from the sky while screaming in a completely insane voice.



"Master Zagan!"

Nephy let out a small scream. The intruder from the sky came flying down straight at Zagan with a kick.

"...I don't know who the hell you are, but I'm in a bad mood right now. Come back later."

Zagan easily stopped the man's kick with a single hand.

"Hyahah! You think that's enough to sto—!?"

A dull crunching sound rang out. Zagan crushed the man's foot in his hand. He then swung his arm and threw the man into the sea as if casting away a pebble.

"UGAAAAAH!?"

An Archdemon had flung him away in a fit of rage, so there was no way the man would get off lightly, and without sinking into the water at all, the man tumbled about on the water's surface as if it were completely solid. It truly was like a pebble skipping across the water. Given enough pressure, water was said to be capable of even splitting a stone in two. The fact that the man was being bounced off the surface of the water was just an indication of the speed at which this man was thrown. A normal human, or even most sorcerers, would have all the bones in their body shatter from this. Normally, that is...

"HAAHAA! How nice! How strong! Now *this* is how the strongest is supposed to be!"

The man stood atop the water's surface as if he hadn't been struck at all. He had a strange appearance to him. He wore a discolored, dark red robe which looked like he tore it off a corpse, and from what one could see beneath the robe, he had bandages wrapped around his body covered in a countless number of circuits. He wore metal knuckles on his hands meant for hand to hand combat, and had leather shin plates reinforced with metal fittings.

He looked like he was all skin and bones, but Zagan could tell that this man's body was in fact trained to the point where it was entirely composed of muscle. He looked to be about twenty years old. His red hair was just growing all over the place and largely covered his face. And within the gaps of his hair, Zagan could catch a glimpse of a single crimson eye.

Is this guy... a sorcerer...?

Zagan couldn't identify the bandages wrapped around his body, but his fist wrapping and boots had sorcery cast on them to enhance his strength. What was even more peculiar than the bandages wrapped around his body, though, was the eye-patch which covered the right side of his face. It was even fit in place with chains and other fiendish looking metal fittings, which gave off the feeling that it was definitely something to be avoided.

What a creepy guy.

As Zagan laid bare his disgust, the man screamed out.

"The name's Decarabia! I came to pick a fight with the Sorcerer Slayer! Archdemon Zagan!"

Zagan came to a sudden understanding upon hearing that name.

I see, he definitely has some screws loose.

The man—Decarabia—finished yelling and came flying in with a fist. He showed no signs of receiving any damage at all from before.

Zagan wasn't wearing his robe or his amulets, but it didn't seem the cause of this was because Zagan was lacking his usual magical support from them. Apparently Decarabia wasn't just an ignorant fool.

"Stand back, Nephy. I'm going to vent a little, so it'll get a little rough."

After distancing himself from Nephy, Zagan got in position to receive the strike... However, he still had the round glasses he got from Alshiera gripped in his left hand. Only a few seconds had passed, but by that time, the man was already right before his eyes.

"HYAHA! 'Ere we go ZAGAAAAAN!"

"Don't use my name so casually."

Zagan replied bluntly, and artlessly struck out his right fist. The sorcery Zagan specialized in the most was physical reinforcement. Just a single strike from his fist could pulverize a fortress wall, and when he devoured the sorcery of others, its power increased exponentially. In other words, if Zagan were to seriously swing his fist, even the head of an Archdemon would go flying.

He drove his fist towards the left side of Decarabia's face that wasn't covered by an eye-patch, and... Decarabia's face didn't crumble into pieces and explode.

"Huh...!?"

In the next instant, Zagan was the one to get punched in the face. Fresh blood went flying into the air along with the dull thud from the metal hand covers.

"Master Zagan!" Nephy screamed.

I got overpowered?

It was the first time he had experienced this since becoming a sorcerer. There were cases like Barbatos and Bifrons where they tenaciously survived Zagan's punch. There were also cases like Michael where his punch was deflected. However, this time around...

Decarabia's eye opened wide, and he broke out into a grin.

"Hyah, what a nice guy. You mighta hit me if you swung with your left."

"Don't pay it any mind. The strong do not take advantage of the shortcomings of the weak."

With that, Zagan swung his fist down from above.

"Hyah! Cheers to our kind Archdemon!"

Decarabia also thrust out his fist while shouting something inexplicable. And Zagan certainly saw it this time. Right when his fist was on the verge of coming into contact with Decarabia's face, Decarabia completely vanished.

No... he moved in!

Shockingly, this man plunged even further in despite Zagan's terrifying fist coming down at him. And with Zagan missing his target,

it was now Decarabia who thrust out his fist full force right at Zagan's face. The shock of the punch was enough to darken his vision. It was like the force behind Zagan's own fist was turned around and came right back at him. The strike from below sent Zagan bending backwards... and then he wiped away the blood from his nose as if nothing happened at all.

"Hmm. Now that's impressive."

"Geeheehee, you're amazin' too! Now this is an Arch—"

"That damn Barbatos. Even though I always punch him with this amount of force, he can keep acting as if nothing happened, huh?"

With someone around to punch all the time with such destructive power, even Zagan would learn to hesitate and hold back as to not do something careless. And yet, Barbatos merrily kept coming back for more. It was to the point where Zagan was worried whether or not he was a masochist. And as Zagan admired his undesirable friend, Decarabia's expression suddenly changed.

"...Hey, Zagan. That just ain't right. Come on!"

Decarabia came in with another punch, and Zagan didn't avoid it, nor did he block it, he simply stood there. In complete contrast to his insane speech and conduct, Decarabia's blows were sharp and precise. If one were to throw sand at this man's face, he would likely be able to punch every speck out of the air. And he was continuously driving those precise fists into Zagan's body.

Struck in the face, bored in the stomach, flesh torn, muscles crushed, blood pouring from his brow, Zagan was turned into a dark red mess in the blink of an eye.

"I came all the way across that freakin' ocean just to have a go with you! Don't ignore me! Look at me! I'm Decarabia! Come on! Come on! COME OOOOON!"

Nephy covered her face as if unable to look on, but Zagan simply gazed at Decarabia as if it wasn't a big deal at all.

"Borin'! How borin'! Gimme back all that time I spent getting' here, ZAGAAAAA-ERK!?"

The moment Decarabia went in for the finishing blow, Zagan grasped his face with the grip of an eagle. Since he was shorter than Zagan, he was now being lifted in the air like that.

"GAACK! L-Lemme go!"

"I see. So this is 'art.' This is the first time I've seen a sorcerer use it, but your blows are so light it's laughable."

By the time Zagan finished letting out a sigh, his wounds had practically vanished completely. The reason he momentarily blacked out from the first two punches was because the strength of an Archdemon's punch was returned right back at him. This man's fists alone didn't possess enough power to strike down Zagan.

“There’s a certain element of surprise, but once the trick is exposed, this is how it turns out. Even the alleyway waifs these days use such tricks. I’m surprised you even thought of challenging an Archdemon with such child’s play.”

Zagan’s voice even had a hint of pity to it. Back in his days as a powerless waif, he was taught the bare minimum martial arts to protect his own body. His consciousness was pulled towards the glasses in his left hand. Yes. That busy body of a boy was the one to teach him. It could be said that the reason Zagan was able to defeat any enemy with his fists was because of the techniques deeply ingrained in his mind at those times.

“Arts are a means to protect one’s own body against the church or sorcerers by using only one’s own body as a weapon. Is there even a reason for the strong to steal that from the weak? Know your place.”

To Zagan, martial arts were the last means with which one could protect themselves from those who possessed money and power. A sorcerer using it was the same as the rich prying money out of the poor’s hands to him. There was no way he could allow such cowardice. However, Decarabia’s body began squirming around even with his face clutched in the air.

“GYAHAAH! Oh man, so you do remember!”

Decarabia wrapped his legs around Zagan’s arm and grasped his wrist. Furthermore, he pressed his ankles against Zagan’s neck and twisted his entire body towards the ground. This was a type technique to wrench the joints to their very extremities. However, Zagan didn’t move an inch.

“I already told you. You’re far too powerless to do anything.”

Zagan slammed his arm to the ground with Decarabia still wrapped around it.

“GEHYAH!?”

Decarabia was helplessly slammed headfirst into the ground. Even though the ground beneath them was all sand, there was enough force to make Decarabia lose his hold on Zagan’s arm. And with Decarabia’s face still firmly clutched, Zagan began gathering mana in his right hand.

“A sorcerer should fight using sorcery. Just like this — Lightning Spear.”

What Zagan specialized in the most after physical enhancement was lightning sorcery. This spell in particular was one he favored which brought lightning down from the sky to reduce everything into atoms. It possessed enough power to rival Barbatos’ Flames of Indignation.

Now that I think about it, it’s been a while since I used normal sorcery. And the moment Zagan was thinking that...

“GYAHAAH! Here it comes! You used sorcery!!”

Zagan couldn't understand what happened in the moment. The moment his Lightning Spear was about to strike Decarabia, it pierced Zagan's body instead.

“Guh-wah?”

Struck head-on by the lightning, Zagan's right arm was carbonized all the way up to his shoulder. And with a good portion of his body reduced to ash, he fell to a knee.

No way! That was...

Zagan's eyes shot open in shock, and Nephy murmur affirmed his suspicion.

“Master Zagan's sorcery... was reflected?”

The moment a sorcerer unleashed their sorcery could be said to be the moment they were most vulnerable. And since his own sorcery was reflected at this time, there was no way he could defend against it. In truth, Zagan was unable to get back on his feet right away. He had taken the attack of an Archdemon full force. His regeneration couldn't keep up.

I see. Even an incompetent brat could kill someone with this.

Zagan recalled the sorcerer that was killed once before from the same thing. It even made him feel fear as to what would have happened here if he had used Heaven's Phosphor instead.

After using such flashy sorcery though, it was only natural that others in the area saw it.

“Hey, who the hell is that?”

Those who were running around the island looking for food came running over. The ones that came into view were the Angelic Knights. It was as one would expect for them to react so fast, seeing as this sort of situation was their specialty. The speed at which they judged what was going on and took action was quite admirable.

Decarabia's head slanted to the side as he stood back up.

“Oooh? What's this? A whole lotta them just came crawlin' out! Can I break 'em? It's fine, right? Okay! Let's break 'em all! Breakin' things is my specialty! HYAHAAHAAHAAHAAH!”

And just as he began licking his chops at those running over from the forest...

“...What a coincidence. Breaking things is also my specialty.”

Kuroka was right behind Decarabia with both her swords already drawn.

“Wuh!?”

By the time he noticed, Kuroka had already swung her swords. Decarabia's right hand went flying into the air. The strike from below was just like a grim reaper's scythe as it severed his right arm completely.

“GYAAAAAAAAAAAAA!?”

“You’re done.”

Kuroka brought down her sword on Decarabia’s neck without hesitation. However, Zagan stopped her.

“Don’t, Kuroka!”

“Huh!?”

Just a single step behind, Kuroka also noticed the irregularity. She managed to bring herself to a stop, but she was just an instant too late.

“AAAaah... Just kiddin’!”

“Ack...”

Decarabia’s right hand seized Kuroka’s neck. A new right hand had sprouted out of the severed stump in an instant. Tabaxis were a race who possessed extraordinary mana, but they were not a particularly powerful race. Decarabia squeezed down on her dainty neck, leading Kuroka’s complexion to darken considerably.

“Oooh, a kitty cat. This is my first time pettin’ a kitty cat. What a slender neck. Should I snap it? Should I crush it? Aah, it might be even more fun just to look at it ’til it can’t breathe no more too... Oof, ow? Ow?”

Kuroka stabbed her short swords precisely into Decarabia’s vitals even while she was being strangled, but he wasn’t phased at all.

Are all of this guy’s circuits dedicated to regeneration and reinforcement?

It was at least to the point where he could instantly regenerate a severed limb. When it came to simple regenerative ability, he even surpassed an Archdemon.

Decarabia’s face twisted with a smile.

“Aren’t kitty cats meant to be pets? It ain’t cute at all though... should I kill it?”

I won’t let you!

Zagan stood himself up, but faster than he could even do that, someone ran in like a bolt of lightning.

“Shine—Sacred Sword Azrael!”

A ray of light instantly went to tear Decarabia’s face apart.

“Whoa! That’s bad!”

Decarabia instantly jumped back, but his right arm, which was strangling Kuroka, was once more severed from his body.

“Hak, gah.”

Kuroka fell to the ground, coughing violently. And the one to stand before her and cover her was Chastille.

“Sorry Kuroka. I had to pick up my stuff, so I was a little late.”

She had her Sacred Sword in hand. It appeared that the moment she noticed the attack, she ran off to grab her sword. She looked

awfully composed, but her breathing was ragged. As for Decarabia, he escaped into the skies and was pinning down his severed arm.

“Ow! Ow! OOOW! How nice! HOW NICE! It’s gettin’ fun in here!”

He didn’t seem capable of regenerating the wound caused by the Sacred Sword, but contrary to expectation, he looked to be ecstatic.

“What’s with this guy...”

Chastille shrank back and trembled from the creepy feeling he was giving off. And just at that time, something fell down below Decarabia’s feet with a thud.

“Haah?”

It was Decarabia’s chain and metal fitting covered eye-patch. It was likely grazed by Chastille’s strike just now. And naturally, all gazes focused on Decarabia’s face which the eye-patch had been covering.

“What... the...?”

Chastille let out a bewildered voice. Decarabia’s exposed right eye was tumbling about every which way. His eye-patch had been hiding a silver eye. And this made Zagan freeze up entirely.

What the hell is that eye?

It had the same color as Zagan’s eye. However, the eyeball gave off an indescribable sense of discomfort. It likely wasn’t his original eye, but an artificially implanted one. And above all else...

He planted that kind of cursed eyeball into his own body... is this guy crazy?

No, he didn’t look in any way sane to begin with. The artificial silver eye showed signs of such a sinister curse on it that it made even Zagan feel like puking upon seeing it. Just half a month ago, Zagan suffered from a curse cast by a dragon and an Archdemon. When it came to the simple strength of the curse, this one couldn’t really compare, but that artificial eye had been there far longer — it was likely it had been festering with a curse for several hundred years. A suffocating mana was pouring out of the artificial eye.

Decarabia pinned down his right eye, and let out a sigh.

“...Tch, you ruined it. You, woman, and the cat too, you guys Zagan’s friends? OK. I’ve made up my mind. I’m gonna start by killin’ you two first! Do your best to run, struggle, and desperately resist your death! GYAHAHAHAHAHA!”

And leaving behind his insane laughter, Decarabia slammed into the ground. A massive cloud of sand took shape, and blocked off everyone’s vision.

“Haa!”

Chastille tore apart the cloud of sand with a single slash of her Sacred Sword, but the lunatic was no longer there.

Chapter IV: There Is No God in This World, but It Seems Demons and Angels Are Lurking Everywhere

This sorcerer had no talent for sorcery. He had a severe deficiency of the requisite mana to put sorcery to use. Nevertheless, there was a reason that he had to get stronger no matter the cost.

His little sister.

He didn't remember whether their parents abandoned them or whether they died. He had no other relatives, so protecting his beloved little sister became Decarabia's meaning in life.

There were a limited number of ways the two of them were able to survive as children. It was impossible to do so by upholding a sense of morals. He stole, snatched food, got beaten to a pulp every now and then, and lived a secret, small life in the darkness. The only ways of escaping that life were either to rise above it or just to die a dog's death.

And the simplest way for a child to rise above it was to become a sorcerer. However, he no longer had any time left. He was at the age where he was on the verge of being an adult, and one day he would be arrested by the adults and judged as an adult. Precisely because he survived until he reached such an age, the number of crimes he had committed was considerable, and it was entirely within reason that he would be executed.

If that were to happen, he wouldn't be able to protect his sister. And on a certain day where he was in a panic to resolve that, he came to know of the existence of a certain tool.

The King's Silver Eye—a magical artifact which rapidly enhanced one's mana and granted them infinite knowledge. In a turn of good fortune, he came to know of the sorcerer who possessed it. If he were to steal it, he could become a sorcerer. And then, he witnessed something while he preyed on the sorcerer waiting for his opportunity.

The sorcerer who possessed the King's Silver Eye was devoured by it.

It was clear that this was a dangerous item. Nevertheless, he no longer had any choice but to steal the Silver Eye from its now deceased owner. And so, the Silver Eye acknowledged him as its

vessel.

Now endowed with tremendous power as a sorcerer, he was freed from the threat of adults. He was now capable of giving his little sister an ordinary life. Those days went by so smoothly he could even see his dream being fulfilled. However, on a certain day, he ended up meeting that sorcerer.

A young man who possessed silver colored eyes just like the King's Silver Eye. So he challenged that young man, and then...

"...Huh? What happened after that again?"

Decarabia cocked his head to the side while lurking in the forests of the uninhabited island, keeping an eye on Zagan's group. The wound he had received from the Sacred Sword was deeper than he thought, and was taking longer than planned to heal.

He remembered the fact that he had confronted Zagan that day and lost to him. However, he couldn't really remember how it all ended.

Wait a tick, why did I end up fightin' with him anyways?

Decarabia tried searching his mind for the answer, but the King's Silver Eye embedded into his eye socket throbbed violently as if it were festering. Perhaps because his eye-patch was broken, the throbbing felt like it was far worse than usual. He scratched at his eye to try and stop the throbbing, peeling away his skin and causing blood to pour to the ground. But even so, the throbbing wouldn't stop, and he continued scratching until even chunks of meat were falling out. And as he continued scratching away, he never even gave a single thought to a doubt he should have had.

Just where did his beloved little sister disappear to?



"How's your wounds, Kuroka?"

A few hours had passed since Decarabia vanished. The sun was setting. And Kuroka was crouching down, cradling her knees on the beach dyed by the setting sun. As Zagan called out to her, the cait sith didn't raise her head to look at him, but instead waved her two tails.

"...I'm fine. Miss Nephys's healing power is the same as Miss Nephtheros', it doesn't hurt at all. Besides..." Kuroka touched her neck that was on the verge of being crushed by Decarabia. "It really didn't feel like it would leave a wound anyways... Mister, you did something with your sorcery, right?"

Zagan was seriously injured at the time, but it wasn't like he was just cowering on his knees either. He managed to place Heaven's Scale between Decarabia's hand and Kuroka's neck on the spur of the moment.

That guy was actually pretty weak. So he wouldn't be able to break

Heaven's Scale.

It was likely that the mana he possessed as a sorcerer wasn't really all that high. Naturally, since he did at least defeat an Archdemon, he surely possessed the means to compensate for the deficiency.

Zagan stared fixedly at Kuroka's face.

"Your wounds seem totally fine, but you don't look fine at all."

Kuroka's tails drooped down along with her shoulders.

"Mister, it's actually painful if you act kind to me now... Please leave me be."

"Well, I get it."

Zagan instead sat down next to Kuroka. And as he sat there in silence simply staring off into the setting sun, Kuroka's triangular ears twitched about in a troubled manner.

"...I guess that's just how you are. You really are someone who tries to protect weaker children, huh?"

Decarabia had declared that he would target Kuroka and Chastille before coming after Zagan. Chastille had the Angelic Knights and Barbatos with her, but Kuroka had nothing but non-combatants like Lilith and Selphy. That's why Kuroka was on her own out here like this. It was a matter of course that she did so to protect them, but it was troublesome if she was misunderstood.

Zagan let out a sigh and poked Kuroka's head.

"Fool. Just who would protect those who cower away just because they're weak? You fought for my sake. You were defeated for my sake. And you're cowering here for my sake. I'm not such a feeble-minded king that I would just ignore that."

Decarabia had claimed he would start with Kuroka and Chastille. Therefore, the reason Kuroka was out here all on her own looking depressed was to lure the sorcerer out. Kuroka finally raised her face and turned towards Zagan. She then let out a weak laugh.

"You've really seen through everything, huh Mister?"

"That's because the way you try to carry your burden meaninglessly all on your own is just like Raphael."

After he mentioned Raphael's name, Kuroka hung her head down in a troubled manner.

"Is Father doing alright?"

"Yeah. He's devoting himself faithfully back at the castle. If you're worried about him, then come visit. The castle's right next to town."

"...I'll consider it... Hey, Mister, did you finish setting things up? It looks like you took a full lap of the island."

Kuroka tried changing the subject. The reason Zagan had only come to see Kuroka after this much time had already passed was because he was busy doing something else.

"It isn't anything as elaborate as a setup. This area has become my

domain, but it wasn't yet functioning as one. All I did was setup the simplest barrier."

Kuroka shook her head in reply.

"I don't know much about sorcery, but is making a barrier from scratch something difficult to do even for a sorcerer like you, Mister?"

"No, that known as sorcery is fundamentally planted in 'drawing a magic circle.' A personally drawn magic circle can have its durability and effect enhanced by substituting portions of the drawing for chants and tools too."

"So, did you draw a big magic circle that could cover the entire island?"

"Yeah. Although, there's a way of reducing the steps to do so. If you make good use of it, even your footsteps can become a cornerstone of the magic circle."

Its effect would likely last somewhere around a couple years. It was more than enough for something he had put together on the spot.

"That guy should still be somewhere here on this island. I'll be able to locate him with this."

What I really want to identify is the means by which he's moving around though.

According to Zagan's expectations, there was no way of moving around normally. Having said that, he didn't look like such a skilled sorcerer that he could use teleportation like Barbatos. Zagan had a theory of what was going on, but he didn't have any definitive proof. If he could find out where Decarabia was hiding, he could find out for sure just how he was moving around.

Kuroka opened her eyes in wonder.

"So, did you find that sorcerer?"

"Yeah. But anyways." Zagan stuck out a small smoked fish that he snitched. "First, fill your stomach."

Zagan plopped the fish into Kuroka's hand, and moved on to chewing one of his own. Kuroka's mouth popped open in surprise.

"Fill my stomach? Is it fine not to attack now?"

"Hear me Kuroka. That's a mistake that amateurs often make. There is a need to anger your opponent when taking revenge or retaliating."

"A-Anger them?"

"Yeah. Anger narrows one's outlook, darkens one's eyes, and makes it so that one is only able to see themselves. The humiliation that you can grant them like that will last a lifetime. When one is unilaterally tormented by anger and humiliation, all that is left is despair. And once you gaze upon their figure bawling pitifully, you've finally accomplished your retribution."

"...I'm really glad I'm not someone you want to get revenge on

Mister.”

Kuroka had for some reason turned pale, but Zagan continued on anyways.

“Let’s go back to the original topic. A sorcerer can survive for two or three days without eating anything, but it’s a different matter entirely if you consider whether or not they’ll get angry at seeing others eating some delicious looking food. With that guy’s personality, he’s definitely monitoring us too.”

It was pretty petty harassment, but it was effective precisely because hunger was one of the three desires which drove living beings forward.

It’s a different matter if it’s someone like me or Nephy who have stopped feeling anything, but Decarabia is the type to be driven by his desires.

That’s why an attack on his hunger would be quite effective. And that meant that Zagan was luring Decarabia out at all times. The barrier wasn’t required for that. And so, he put on a show of devouring the small smoked fish.

“This is called niboshi, right? This is my first time having smoked fish, but this stuff seems like it would go well with liquor. Seems like Lilith prepared some of Liucaon’s liquor for us too. Would you like some?”

“I completely lose a sense of my surroundings if I have any alcohol, so liquor is a little... Does the niboshi suit your tastes?”

“Yeah. Even having simple things, like smoked goods, is a recent discovery for me after all.”

Kuroka let out a laugh at Zagan’s answer.

“So even you tell jokes, huh Mister? Aren’t smoked goods available all over the continent? Like ham, bacon, cheese, and the like, right?”

“...Mm. You’re right.”

Zagan had never even thought of eating such expensive food before he met Nephy, and he didn’t know how smoked food was prepared in the first place. Zagan’s meals at the time were entirely composed of dried meat which was pickled in salt. It was something that was usually made when livestock was too old. In Zagan’s case, he hunted animals in the forest. Frankly speaking, half of it was rotten. Zagan found out way later that this type of meat was a last resort for farmers who were on the verge of starving out and had no other choice.

What was even more tragic was that he had fed the same thing to Nephy when he first met her. Ever since then, Nephy had become obsessed with the sense of duty that she had to do something about his meals herself. Her meals were delicious, but it hurt his heart a

little.

After talking a little, Kuroka seemed to get her feelings back in order a little, and began speaking about something that was hard for her to say.

"I got... treated by Miss Nephy earlier."

"Mm. I heard."

"Miss Nephy told me... that she may be able to heal my eyes."

That was only obvious.

It's impossible to completely restore it with sorcery, but mysticism is another matter.

The damage to Kuroka's eyes had happened too long ago. To do something with sorcery, they would have to steal eyes from someone else, or create artificial magic eyes and transplant them. Furthermore, such borrowed eyes would have to have mana poured into them constantly for them to be effective. One couldn't really call that a 'complete' recovery.

There was a possibility that Nephy's mysticism could overturn that fact entirely. Nephy herself didn't like the power, but she would use it if it were for the sake of another. At any rate, this should have been happy news for Kuroka, but her expression wasn't cheerful at all.

"For some reason... I couldn't answer her..."

It seemed that the reason Kuroka was feeling so down wasn't because of her defeat, but because of this fact. Or rather than feeling down, it was more like she was worried.

"Hmm. Are you scared of seeing the light?"

"...Yes." Kuroka nodded at his merciless question. "My people were slaughtered by sorcerers, I joined Azazel, and thinking it was perfectly natural retribution, I killed sorcerers." Kuroka buried her face into her knees and muttered out. "...I killed... a lot..."

"Don't worry about that. In any case, sorcerers are a lot that people try to kill all the time. They become sorcerers knowing that full well. The ones who get killed regardless of that are the fools."

"Is that so...? What if there were people like you among the ones I killed? Just maybe... there were those that would have held their hand out to me..."

"If I could see again, I feel like I would see my sins just that much more clearly."

Zagan could guess that's what Kuroka was implying. That's why she was scared.

"You fool. If a sorcerer were to do such a thing, it would definitely be a trap. Killing them is the right choice."

Kuroka scratched her head as if suddenly assaulted by a headache.

"...Ummm, maybe I worded it wrong. Rather than coming to an understanding and getting along, I'm thinking maybe there was

another way of handling them aside from killing them..."

"That's also not a praiseworthy choice though."

However, it wasn't like Zagan didn't understand what she was saying.

This feels like what Nephy and Chastille are trying to accomplish...

Zagan folded his arms and racked his brains over it for a while before coming to an answer.

"Kuroka, you're the last surviving cait sith of Liucaon, right?"

"...Yes."

"Then think of it this way. You must survive. As long as you live, you'll remain as proof of the existence of your people. And so, you killed sorcerers for the sake of surviving. That's because you would receive the favor of the Church by killing sorcerers. It was necessary. Try thinking of it like that."

Kuroka was left dumbfounded at his overbearing logic. She then returned a strained smile like it couldn't be helped.

"Hey, Mister, do I look like I want to die?"

"I don't know if you want to die, but you look like you don't know what you're living for."

Kuroka's shoulders drooped down gloomily.

"Lilith scolded me... for the same thing... And when I said that I need to spend the rest of my life atoning for those I killed..."

This left even Zagan astonished.

"I'm sure she got angry. From her perspective, she was finally reunited with her childhood friend she never thought she would meet again, but that friend was practically saying that she had no reason to keep living."

"I-I do have a reason to live, though."

"You can't call that living. Living means enjoying pleasure, fulfilling your desires, and obtaining joy. You can't call just avoiding death living."

Kuroka cast her gaze to the ground in a bewildered manner.

"...I mean... is it really alright to justify it like that...?"

"Is there a problem?"

"I just think maybe living should be something more pure, and noble."

Zagan finally broke into a smile as if to praise her.

"Look at that. You do get it. Living is vulgar, wretched, and unsightly. That's precisely why those who try their best to live are beautiful, and noble."

"Even though it's unsightly... it's noble?"

"Yeah. What you lack is desire. Start by having something you wish for. Something that you would struggle wretchedly to obtain."

Just how did she interpret his words? Kuroka still had her gaze

cast to the gown, but opened her mouth to speak timidly nonetheless.

“I’m still scared... to see the light. But, there is one thing that I want to try.” She then pointed her eyes straight at Zagan’s face. “I want to know... just what kind of face you have, Mister.”

Even Zagan knew just what action that implied for the blind girl.

“Very well. Do as you like.”

With Zagan’s permission, Kuroka timidly put the tips of her fingers to Zagan’s face. The moment her middle fingers came into contact, both her hands trembled in fear. It was as if she would dirty his face just from touching him. But even so, her index finger, ring finger, thumb, and little finger all came into contact one by one as if to confirm Zagan was really there. Before they knew it, the sun had completely set, and her fingers which were exposed to the night wind were cold.



What's this? Even I'm getting tense now.

Kuroka moved her fingers one by one, and let out a sigh of relief. Her movements were slow, and somehow appeared like they were reluctant to separate from him. Before long, she finished inspecting Zagan's face, and put on a troubled smile as she lowered her hands.

"Thank you very much. So that's what your face is like, huh Mister?"

"Was it just as you imagined?"

"No, it's a little scarier than I imagined."

"Then you're on the mark. Are you satisfied?"

Kuroka shook her head.

"Next I want to know what Father's face is like. Then Lilith, and Selphy... I'm sure they've changed."

Upon hearing that reply, Zagan pet Kuroka's head.

"A good answer. So you do get it."

"Heehee. I should've confirmed what your face was like when you were tiny, Mister."

"...Just forget about that already." Zagan groaned with a grimace.

Well, in any case...

Kuroka's smile as she let out a strange laugh looked completely natural, and thinking of that as compensation, it wasn't all that bad a feeling.



Zagan let out a sigh as footsteps then began approaching them from the forest.

"So this is where you were. I've been looking for you, my liege."

And the one to call out to him in a rather shameless voice, was Gremory. With her were Foll, Nephy, Nephteros, Lilith, and Selphy. In short, all the women except for Chastille were present.

In truth, they were all peeking in on what was going on from a distance for some time now. It seemed that they were waiting, seeing that Zagan and Kuroka were having a serious conversation. Turning back to take a look at them, Zagan knit his brows.

"What's with those outfits?"

"Keeheehee, apparently it's a native dress of Liucaon called a *yukata*. Lady Lilith prepared them for us so we tried them on."

Their clothes resembled what Kuroka usually wore, but the hems of the dresses were much more restrictive and looked difficult to move in. They were decorated with beautiful embroidery of flowers and butterflies and such, and though they were quite showy, they also gave off a rather calm impression. The first one to grab Zagan's attention was, naturally, Nephy.

Somewhat unexpectedly, Nephy was wearing a bright red outfit. White and pink flowers were embroidered around her sleeves and chest giving off a very cheerful impression. Thinking of her usual calm maid's outfit, this appeared to be very showy on her.

So even this kind of vibrant clothing suits Nephy, huh?

He was unintentionally entranced by this, leading Nephy to turn bright red as the tips of her ears quivered.

"H-How is it, Master Zagan?"

"M-Mm. I think it's good. Um... You're very... pretty."

It really felt like he was able to openly express his feelings for once, and Nephy used a golden fan to cover her face as she nodded.

"Th-Thank you very much."

Lilith and Selphy then peaked out from behind Nephy. Lilith was wearing a slightly more moderate pink yukata, while Selphy was wearing a light blue one.

"How is it Your Highness? Me and Selphy dressed everyone up, you know?"

"A fine job indeed. I'll treat you two to a reward later."

Zagan replied with a completely serious expression, leaving Lilith somewhat taken aback.

"Is this something to be rewarded for?"

"Yaaay! Mister Zagan's totally giving us a prize!"

Next up, Foll came tottering over. She was wearing a cute orange yukata to match her green hair. It had a decorated child's ball and a semi-circular comb embroidered on it, and appeared to be made for children.

"Zagan, how about me?"

"Mm. It suits you well. Have you had enough to eat?"

Zagan believed she had had enough from their little fishing competition during the afternoon, but it didn't change the fact that they were still quite far from the Dragon Form.

"I'm okay." Foll replied with a yawn. "But I'm sleepy now."

"It is dark out after all. We'll be having dinner shortly, so you'll be able to get to bed soon."

"Mm."

And finally, Zagan shifted his attention over to Nephteros, who was letting her gaze wander around as if she were bored.

"Nephteros. Let me see yours as well."

"M-Mm... How is it?"

His sister-in-law was wearing a calming violet yukata. The design seemed to be a pair with Nephy's and was also embroidered with similar flowers.

Just how will Richard try to woo Nephteros after seeing this?

It was a little mean-spirited, but Zagan kind of wanted to see that

Angelic Knight try his best to court Nephteros, who was quite dull about such affairs.

“Hmmm. It suits you well doesn’t it? As expected of my sister-in-law.”

“R-Really?”

Zagan smiled in satisfaction, and Nephteros gripped the end of her sleeves and spun around on the spot. And seeing her do so, Nephyl also smiled.

“You’re beautiful, Nephteros.”

“Well, so are you, Nephylia.”

They were still somewhat awkward, but seeing them smile at each other truly did give off the feeling that they were siblings. After everyone got Zagan’s impressions, Gremory went on to beckon Kuroka over.

“Come on Lady Kuroka. You should also get changed. As Raphael’s daughter, you are also somewhat like a retainer here. Is it not the duty of a retainer to please the eyes of their king?”

“Please his eyes? Isn’t there an enemy about? Setting him aside, is it really alright for us to be playing around? Even Lady Chastille is being targeted now, right?”

“Keehee, worry not. That crybaby has that idiot Purgatory together with her. Well, he’s pretty poorly matched against that Decarabia or whoever he was. It would take a while to finish him off, but that’s the extent of it.”

She then put on a bright smile and brought her face closer to Kuroka’s.

“Above all, my liege has yet to rescind his order for us to enjoy our break. If we do not enjoy ourselves, we would be revolting against our liege’s orders.”

Kuroka then replied to Gremory with even a hint of anger in her face.

“...What are you talking about? That sorcerer reflected his sorcery earlier didn’t he? How is a sorcerer supposed to defeat him?”

Gremory stared back at Kuroka in wonder.

“That’s not all that impressive a skill, you know? We didn’t bring the golem over, but even I could probably defeat him in less than a minute, and I’m pretty sure the little Lady Foll would truly kill him in but an instant.”

Foll cocked her head to side cutely, while thinking it over, then nodded herself.

“Probably, in one bite?”

Seeing his daughter make that claim, Zagan smiled as if praising a pupil who did well.

“Mm. An assessment without relying on spirit, disdain, nor

humility. That is the proper analysis.”

“Hehehe...”

Zagan brushed Foll’s head as she smiled back in delight.

“So, why was he so hard pressed in the fight?”

“Who knows? My liege is whimsical, so I cannot even begin to guess his true intentions. It’s likely he was just deep in thought about something, right?”

She hit the nail right on the head.

That guy talked like he knew me already. Moreover...

The martial art that Decarabia used was on Zagan’s mind. It seemed there was an uncountable number of styles and schools within martial arts, but Zagan felt like what Decarabia used was very similar to his own. Moreover, this incident happened right after Zagan was given such strange information from Alshiera. He didn’t think it was all unrelated. Above all else, was that repulsive artificial eye.

Silver-Eyed King.

Alshiera was fixated on using that name. Could it really be a coincidence that two people with silver eyes would show up? That’s why Zagan wanted to know who exactly that man was and didn’t try to kill him. Well, there was also the reason that just normally killing a sorcerer who used martial arts wouldn’t be enough either.

Gremory let out a sudden laugh, and put her hand to Kuroka’s cheek.

“Well, the reason that my liege didn’t kill him is simply because there was no need, or perhaps it was more convenient to keep him alive. When it is better to kill them, my liege is one who is unexpectedly merciless. In short, your worries are but a needless anxiety.” Gremory then snapped back at Zagan. “Ah! Now that I think of it my liege. I’m the only one you haven’t praised yet!”

“Huh? Do I have to?”

“Of course you do!”

Gremory’s yukata used black as a basic tone, and was embroidered with glamorous looking butterflies. The granny in the form of a beautiful woman took a spin on the spot.

“How is it? I’m quite the looker in such an outfit aren’t I?”

“Go say that to Kimaris. You’ve known him for quite some time, haven’t you?”

For some reason Gremory twiddled her fingers together and turned red in the face.

“Hwah? I-I don’t really have that sort of relationship with Kimaris... I’m not saying that I hate him or anything...”

This idiot goes yelling around about that nonsensical love power or whatever it is to everyone, but is completely useless when it comes to herself?

She truly was a troublesome granny. As Zagan sighed in exasperation, Gremory regained her composure and shot back up.

“Gah! Kimaris has nothing to do with this, right!? Take a look at this yukata! No, take a look at me! And praise me!”

“Why exactly are you in such high spirits today?”

Gremory even had tears in her eyes at this point.

“Do you not know already my liege? This may in fact be my last night in this world. I don’t care if you’re just paying me lip service! I at least want someone to praise me for being pretty in this final moment of my life!”

She was wailing in such desperation that Kuroka was no longer able to conceal her sense of sympathy for her.

“Hey, Mister, did something happen to her?”

“Aah... She angered her teacher, an Archdemon, and ran away from her punishment. If it’s found out that after running away, she was going around enjoying herself however she liked, it won’t end very peacefully.”

“Ugh... Can you even call spending half a month doing nothing but researching sorcery without a single chance to love a beautiful girl living!? Nay! You cannot! If I must be dead while I live, then I’d rather die on the spot after going all out!”

Gremory was stamping on the sandy beach while making such a resolute claim that it was almost refreshing. She then looked up at Zagan with upturned eyes.

“It doesn’t matter who it is, someone praise me.”

“Aah, it’s alright. That yukata suits you. Anyone who sees it would praise you.”

As expected, it was getting rather pitiful to watch her, so Zagan complied, to which Gremory shyly scratched her cheek.

“Huh...? It’s kind of embarrassing to be praised so honestly like that.”

“What the hell do you want...?”

She was starting to give Zagan a headache, but this also felt somewhat nostalgic to him.

Now that I think of it, Stella also liked this kind of horseplay.

She was the girl in the picture from Zagan’s childhood. He was concerned about Marc, but Zagan had no idea what had happened to her since then either. Marc would suddenly vanish all the time, but Stella completely vanished before anyone knew it. Thinking of it normally, she either died or was caught by slave dealers, but thinking back on it, Zagan hoped she was still alive.

Zagan shook off the memories that were suddenly filling his head, and pointed at the no good granny.

“Hear me Kuroka. Well, I won’t tell you to go quite so far, but you

should follow in her footsteps when it comes to so shamelessly indulging in your desires.”

Kuroka looked quite troubled, as one would expect, but nodded with a refreshing smile nonetheless.

“Understood. This is the first time I’ve seen someone so focused on life. I see. Wretched, unsightly... and yet... beautiful... right...? Hya!?”

A spurt of blood shot out of Gremory’s nose.

“Nice... love power... I have... no regrets...”

She then collapsed in a pool of her own blood.

“Zagan... She did it again...” Foll muttered.

“Just leave her be.”

Zagan then bopped Kuroka’s head.

“Well, that’s how it is. Go dress up together with this lot and enjoy yourself.”

“What about you, Mister?”

“Me? Well...”

Zagan took a glance over at Nephy. It was a rare occasion where she was all dressed up. Moreover, the beach at night built quite the good atmosphere. He felt like spending some time alone with her. And perhaps having read that atmosphere, Nephteros cut into their conversation.

“Now that I think of it, who can take care of the cooking? I’ve never done it before.”

With that one phrase, a hopeless silence dominated the area. Lilith stared down at the ground uncomfortably, and Gremory was sprawled on the ground incapacitated with a smile. It also seemed like they couldn’t really rely on Chastille and the Angelic Knights either.

Or rather, they were patrolling the island to deal with Decarabia. It wasn’t really time for them to think about dinner. So if Zagan were to take Nephy away with him, just who would cook? And the one to break that heavy silence, was a carefree voice incapable of reading the atmosphere.

“Yup! Right here! I’m on cooking duty at the castle, so I can like, totally make dinner here!”

“Wait, Selphy... Don’t you have any pride as royalty?” Lilith remarked.

“My pride sank together with that boat in Suflaghida!”

Foll then chimed in, sleepily rubbing her eyes.

“I can... also... do a little. I’m... the big sister... after all...”

Well, setting aside Foll who was dozing off, Selphy was being personally trained by Raphael, she would at least be capable of cooking... probably.

Nephteros then muttered full of curiosity.

“Hmmm... Could I make something too?”

“It’s A-OK! Everyone follow me!”

Seeing Selphy be the most reliable one here was a dreadfully concerning situation, but Zagan could do nothing but see them off. Nevertheless, it was a rare opportunity to see that dunce try her best to create an opportunity for him. And so, Zagan held his hand out to Nephy.

“Then, should we go for a little walk, Nephy?”

“My pleasure, Master Zagan.”

And as the two of them began to walk, Kuroka called out to them.

“Um, Miss Nephy.”

“Yes? What is it?”

Kuroka tightly gripped her trembling hands, then gathered her resolve as she continued.

“I’m... still scared of seeing the world. But, when I’ve made the determination to properly face it all, could I please ask you to do something? I want to...” Kuroka choked on her words, but nevertheless, she gathered herself and spoke clearly. “I want to see the world once more, could you... heal me...?”

Nephy walked up to Kuroka and embraced the trembling girl.

“Yes. I will wait as long as you please, so there is no need to panic. Don’t rush, and please be kind to yourself as well.”

With that, Kuroka finally let the strength out of her shoulders and nodded.

“Thank you... very much...”

And so, Zagan and Nephy walked off hand in hand.

(...How amazing... So that’s the woman he fell in love with.)

Her soft whisper was heard by none, and vanished into the ocean’s waves.



“Hm. This so-called yukata is quite different for men, huh?”

Nephy had brought over clothes for Zagan to wear. It was likely Gremory who had her bring it over, anticipating that they would go for a walk along the beach. She was a troublesome granny, but she was also quite tasteful at times like these. Zagan was wearing a dark gray yukata which had less-fluttery sleeves than the female version, and more room to move his legs around in.

Nephy nodded with a slight tinge of red to her cheeks.

“It suits you well, Master Zagan.”

“M-Mm. It’s a little discomforting not to have my robes, but this isn’t all that bad once in a while.”

“The clothing you wore when you were little was also lovely you know?” Nephy muttered happily.

“...I want you to forget all about that.”

To Zagan, his past was something bitter, painful, and something he didn't want to remember. Nevertheless, after becoming small, now the names of the other children he hung out with at the time were coming up. He came to fully realize that his past was something that would chase after him forever like a shadow.

Even if I only go back to the day I met Nephy, I made her eat something horrible too...

He couldn't forget Nephy's face when he brought her withered dry meat and rotting milk. Nephy's emotionless face, brought about by losing her will to live after her childhood at the elven hidden village, stiffened up completely out of sympathy, and a sense of duty. And thinking back on that, Zagan let out a mutter.

"I feel like I've said this before, but you've really changed, Nephy."

"Is that so?"

"Yeah. You're able to show me all sorts of expressions now."

Well, even if her facial expressions were meager, her ears were quite abundant in expressing her emotions all this time. After having that pointed out to her, Nephy looked back at Zagan in a somewhat vexed manner.

"You have also changed you know?"

"Erk, have I?"

Well, he did feel like he was able to more honestly relay his feelings, but even now he was always in distress at how to say the right words at the right time. He couldn't really claim to have grown all that much. Such was the case, but Nephy happily nodded.

"Geez, it doesn't hurt anymore, right?"

"Hurt...? I don't think I have any old wounds though..."

As Zagan puzzled over it for a moment, Nephy shook her head.

"You did... 'Possessing power isn't evil.' When you told me that once before, Master Zagan, you looked like you were in pain you know?"

And that jogged Zagan's memory.

"Is it wrong for the weak to live? Do you feel good showing off your power?"

It happened a long time ago, but Zagan was cursed at like that by a girl he didn't know. After that, Zagan gave up on ever expecting anything from others. He lost all attachment to people. He believed only in himself, relied only on himself, and lived by himself.

Zagan looked down at his clothes with a bitter smile.

I wonder what the me from back then would say if he saw me now?

He was wearing foreign clothing while having fun, walking beside the girl he loved. He went around constantly protecting others. He obtained a daughter, a sister-in-law, and noisy subordinates. It was

everything that he had denied back in those days.

That's exactly why he could shake his head like it was no big deal.

"I've already forgotten about that. I'm sure it's just an inconsequential memory at this point."

He didn't even remember what the girl looked like. She was chased by a bandit or something and got lost in Zagan's domain, but it was the bandit's face that Zagan remembered better. It was a young man with flashy red hair. And now that he thought about it, just one of his eyes was...

"Huh? Oh!" Zagan unintentionally yelled.

"Wh-What's the matter, Master Zagan?"

"It's nothing, I finally remembered who that Decarabia fellow is. He's a bandit I killed before."

"Huh? Bandit? I mean... killed? He looked alive... right?"

"Well, there's rare cases where some guy won't die after being killed."

The members of the Night Clan like Alshiera were an example. The undead were the same in that they could still move around despite being killed. And then there were cases like Archdemon Bifrons who could get their head and heart blown to bits and regenerate them like nothing happened. However, if asked whether Decarabia was such a terrifying existence, Zagan could only shake his head.

"Actually, that guy was a sorcerer? I thought he was just a bandit. Or maybe he became a sorcerer after being killed by me... no, in that case it'd be weird for him to be alive. Hmmm..."

At that time, Zagan was still just a complete amateur who couldn't even put his specialty in devouring sorcery to proper use. Thinking back on it now, he was just one of the riffraff among sorcerers. And Decarabia was someone who was killed by Zagan back then with such ease that he didn't even remain in his memories. He was a complete small fry.

So how did he become a sorcerer who could pick a fight with Archdemons?

If what Michael told him was true, he had already killed one of the Archdemons. It was possible that he simply grew, but it was questionable whether some small fry that looked like nothing more than a bandit was capable of such growth to begin with. Well, Zagan went from waif to Archdemon in the span of a few years, so that may have just been the way the world worked.

And as Zagan racked his brains over all this, Nephy nodded in a convinced manner.

"So, does that mean he stole your sorcery at that time, Master Zagan...?"

Zagan's eyes shot wide open.

Oh yeah, I told Nephy about how devouring sorcery worked.

That would explain why Decarabia was capable of reflecting sorcery, and why he couldn't reach Zagan despite being able to defeat other sorcerers. So Zagan pet Nephy's head like a teacher praising a student who did well.

"You're right. It's more logical to think that he stole it at that time."

"Does that mean there are other possibilities?"

Zagan couldn't give her an immediate answer. However, it wasn't something for him to hide either, so he went on to explain it anyways.

"His eye has the same silver color as mine. Alshiera seems awfully fixated on that, so that point caught my interest."

"...Huh?"

Nephy found this completely incomprehensible.

"I mean, it looked artificial, but wasn't it the same color as mine?"

Moreover, he specialized in reinforcing his body and his style revolved around fighting with his fists. There was a remarkable resemblance between the two. Zagan surely wasn't the only one who thought that after witnessing their battle.

"It's not similar in the least." Nephy was being strangely obstinate, leaving Zagan dumbfounded. "You have no mercy for your enemies, but you wouldn't torment and play with the weak. Everyone calls you their king and idolizes you, there's no way such vulgar scum could resemble you at all. Even if he's trying to imitate you, it's nothing but a pitifully incompetent effort."

Zagan returned a strained smile to Nephy.

My goodness. I can't beat her.

Zagan recalled how some time ago, Nephteros impersonated Nephy and tried to draw near to him. At that time, Zagan had the same air of resentment about him as he disparaged her.

"If you're going to pretend to be Nephy, then put a little effort into copying her!"

Well, it was certainly true that there was a point of commonality between Zagan and Decarabia. There was also more than sufficient cause for him to resent Zagan. The similarity in their powers could also be explained by thinking of it as a fixation with Zagan to enact revenge. However, even though Zagan understood this...

"I feel like... it's all connected in a weird way here..."

"Are you talking about what Miss Alshiera said?"

"Yeah. Having said that, it's just getting more and more incomprehensible though..."

Now then, did Decarabia become a sorcerer before or after Zagan killed him? Was he a bandit at that time to begin with? And say he

were, how was he related to Marc?

That damn Alshiera. Did she just say something random to throw me off after all?

Zagan let out a groan, and suddenly came to a stop.

“Master Zagan?”

“Shh, it’s Barbatos and Chastille”

The pair who were even more awkward than Zagan were standing around on the nighttime beach.



There was nowhere to hide on the beach. Zagan and Nephys quickly moved over to the forest and looked over Zagan’s undesirable friend and the crybaby. After taking a careful look at their surroundings, they also found several of the Angelic Knights watching over Chastille from the shadows of the trees. Richard was among them too.

Aaah.... At times like these, both sorcerers and Angelic Knights think the same, huh?

Well, there were those with their hands on their swords who were completely intent on cutting down Barbatos if he were to do anything wrong though. And as Zagan observed this, his gaze suddenly met Richard’s.

Hm. Guess I’ll ask him.

Zagan drew a magic circle in the air and sent it over to Richard.

“What’s the situation?”

It was sorcery to communicate over a long distance. It wasn’t as sophisticated as the telepathic communication Barbatos was capable of, but it was more than enough to whisper to each other in this case. Richard was startled at hearing a voice from the magic circle all of a sudden, but swiftly regained his composure and responded.

“After Lady Chastille changed into the outfit from Liucaon, Sir Barbatos called out to her using the hunt for the sorcerer as a pretext.”

“What? Barbatos was the one to call her out...? That’s somewhat unexpected.”

“Agreed. And since a few of us were not able to hide our killing intent at such actions, we ended up sneaking off into the forest like this.”

Even if he said ‘a few of us,’ there were only three Angelic Knights here aside from Chastille and Michael. Which meant that they were basically all seething with rage, and one of them likely regained their presence of mind and held the others back.

Zagan looked back over to what Chastille was wearing. She was wearing a blue yukata with a gorgeous embroidery of a bird on it. At a glance, it appeared that Chastille was still in her private life mode, but

she still looked strangely mature. And perhaps because Barbatos was also nervous, neither of them said anything as they gazed off into the sea.

“How long have the two of them been doing that?”

“It’s been about a minute.”

“...How irritating... Just apologize already Barbatos.”

If Foll and his other subordinates were to hear them, they would surely quip back with a ‘You’re one to talk.’ However, there was none here who would point that out to him. Richard simply returned a deep nod.

“Seriously. Thanks to that, we’ve grown tired of waiting and are on the verge of drawing our swords.”

“It’s not like I don’t get where you’re coming from, but keep it in check. If you get in the way, it might just aggravate the situation more.”

Seeing that Zagan and Richard were confirming the situation with a dead serious air about them, Nephys ears pricked up in a troubled manner.

“Um... Master Zagan, this also applies to the Angelic Knights there, but... were you not all on patrol looking for the enemy sorcerer?”

“Forget that nonsense. Isn’t the budding romance between Chastille and Barbatos far more critical? Aren’t you worried too Nephys?”

“Ummm... That’s... Uh... I am...”

In the end, Nephys lined up next to Zagan and joined in on the peepshow. And after waiting for a short while, Chastille seemed to mutter something.

“Tch, we really can’t hear anything from this far away.”

They were apparently talking in hushed voices, and even with his sharpened sense of hearing, Zagan couldn’t make out what they were saying.

If I use sorcery too close to them they’ll notice, but I’ve got no choice!

Zagan once more drew a magic circle in the air. It was the same thing he sent over to Richard earlier. This time he threw it over to Chastilles feet as if tossing a frisbee.

“Hm? Did something just move...?”

“Huh? Ain’t it just the waves or a crab or something?”

It seemed Zagan got away with it without them realizing. Zagan formed a circle with his index finger and thumb to signal Richard and the others that his plan was a success. And the Angelic Knights pumped their fists into the air in delight.

However, since this sorcery relayed sound both ways, Zagan stood his index finger up and urged Nephys to be quiet. Setting aside the

excitement of the spectators, Chastille bashfully twirled her hair in her fingers while mumbling.

“—This was supposed to be a vacation, after all. I didn’t bring my Anointed Armor with me. Having said that, how do I put it... I’m rather reluctant to fight while only wearing a swimsuit or something... or rather...”

It seemed that Barbatos was asking about her yukata, and Chastille was in the middle of making excuses.

Isn’t it fine to just say it suits you or something here!

Zagan cursed at his undesirable friend while watching their exchange in vexation, then relayed what was going on to Richard’s group using hand signals. The Angelic Knights agonized over it in the same manner, and as one of them went to draw his sword with a serious look on his face, another one among them desperately held him back.

Barbatos then replied in a flustered voice.

“A-Ain’t it fine? N-Nobody’s bothered by what you’re wearing or anything.”

Both Zagan and Nephy covered their faces.

You imbecile! You should just say that any outfit would suit you or something, right!?

Seriously, how was his undesirable friend so smart yet so stupid at the same time? Even Chastille’s shoulders drooped at his comment.

Upon seeing Zagan and Nephy’s reaction, the other Angelic Knights sent him a curious gaze. Zagan felt like the Angelic Knights would leap into battle if he explained it as it was, but it wasn’t like he could just leave them out on the actual situation. After relaying what was going on with his hands, Zagan held out his palm to tell them to wait.

“Aah... I mean... I’m not making fun of you or anything okay? Ain’t it just fine to wear whatever you like? Nobody out there would think it looks bad anyways.”

“Hwah? U-Ummm... I-I see...”

Chastille averted her gaze like she wasn’t all that dissatisfied with Barbatos’ awkward phrasing. It seemed that for the time being, the fact that he was complimenting her was getting across. Zagan pumped his fist and signaled to the Angelic Knights that the situation wasn’t bad, and Richard nodded in return with a stern expression indicating that they shouldn’t jump to hasty conclusions.

Next, it was Barbatos who started speaking.

“That time... I wasn’t really making fun of you either, okay?”

“Huh?”

Chastille didn’t expect this at all and looked at him in surprise. Zagan immediately relayed what was going on to the Angelic Knights,

and the one Angelic Knight who was in least control of himself was ready to burst into action, but his partners did their best to hold him down.

And without showing any signs of noticing the outfield, Barbatos continued.

“How do I put it... It’s not like being a crybaby is all that bad, right? Ain’t it way better than being all self-important?”

Chastille pinched her brow at his difficult to understand categorization. Nephy was also growing more irritated at watching them and clung tightly to Zagan’s arm. Zagan was worried about what was going on, but his bride was far too cute. And so, he rubbed his cheek against hers to comfort her.

“Hwah!?”

Nephy’s ears quivered as she raised her voice.

“Hah? You say something?”

“Huh? No. I didn’t... I mean, was it me...?”

The two of them came to some strange understanding, giving both Zagan and Nephy a sense of relief.

“...Geez, please don’t tease me Master Zagan.”

Nephy puffed out her cheeks adorably and glared at Zagan while the Angelic Knights shot over gazes to them while still looking over the situation, but right now was the critical point. After calming down, Chastille replied in a dubious tone.

“Umm... In other words, you mean you’re not making fun of me when you call me a crybaby all the time?”

“Hah? I’m just normally making fun of you at those times you know?”

“...”

Unable to bear it, both Zagan and Nephy keeled over and pinned down their stomachs. And perhaps having noticed that what he said was in fact pretty bad, Barbatos corrected himself.

“Oh, no, that’s not what I mean. It’s true I’m poking fun at you, but it’s not like I’m trying to piss you off or how to put it... Anyways! That’s how it is!”

“I really don’t understand at all...”

Zagan didn’t understand it either and was pretty much at the point where he was going to go down there himself and punch Barbatos, but Chastille strained a smile having been pushed far beyond the realms of mere astonishment.

“Well, you were that kind of person to begin with I guess. I feel like I kind of don’t understand what you’re trying to say a little less.”

“You saying you get it or not...?”

“I wonder...?”

For the time being, it seemed they had broken through their

stalemate. Zagan relayed the fact that the situation had gone from dire to better with hand signals. The situation was so irritating that Richard was now wiping sweat from his brow. Next, Chastille muttered as if this was all simply inevitable.

“Um, that time, was also my bad...”

“Huh? Did you do something?”

“Uh, I mean, didn’t I hit you? I didn’t mean to do that. Sorry, Barbatos.”

“O-Oh...”

Zagan shook his fist in the air to convey that the situation was making a major move. The Angelic Knights were now leaning forward with bated breath as well. And then, Barbatos replied in an awkward tone.

“Aaah, me too... Uh, it was my bad. I didn’t think you’d get so pissed. I won’t say it again... isn’t really something I can promise you, but I’ll be careful.”

“I kind of want you to promise me that though...”

Chastille’s shoulders drooped in exhaustion, but nevertheless, she was certainly smiling.

“But, I guess that’s how you are. I won’t ask for more.”

“Hah, how haughty.”

“You’re one to talk.”



It seemed they had managed to reconcile. Zagan let out a long sigh then raised both his hands to signal that the operation was a success. The Angelic Knights were both celebrating and in rage, but it was clear that they were all relieved to be released from the vexing situation. Also, every one of them was smiling. Zagan himself was also surely smiling.

That was kind of fun.

He felt like he understood Gremory and Manuela just a little bit. Well, it was troublesome when he was the one being watched, but even so, he found it strangely pleasant. And just at that time...

“HYAHYAHYAA! Well aren’tcha havin’ some fun here!? Lemme join in!”

An insane laugh rang out over the beach.

Decarabia!?

He did declare that he would target Chastille and Kuroka first, but this really was the worst timing to do so. Zagan’s reaction was immediate. Before taking even a single step, he deployed a barrier of wind. The multilayered barrier of wind sealed off all sound. This was what he had prepared earlier in the evening, so he was able to deploy it in an instant, severing all sound between Decarabia and Barbatos. And with his next step, the scenery of the island warped.

It wasn’t like space itself was being warped. Using Memorandum, Zagan drew over the scenery using his own imagination. By the time Barbatos and Chastille turned to look, they couldn’t see Zagan, Nephry, the Angelic Knights, and naturally, even Decarabia.

There was no third step forward. Zagan’s body was already in the sky delivering a roundhouse kick to Decarabia. This was a form of martial arts to deliver a full power kick. Decarabia was fully focused on Chastille, and didn’t even recognize Zagan was there by the time a heel was digging into his face.

He plummeted into the ground, smashed through trees, dug up the earth, and was sent flying to the other side of the island. It all happened in less than three seconds. Zagan was still floating in the sky, but Barbatos and Chastille couldn’t see him because of the barrier obscuring their sight. By the time Zagan struck down Decarabia, Barbatos and Chastille had finally finished turning around.

“Huh? I feel like I heard his laughter just now.”

“Sounded more like screaming than laughing didn’t it? Only heard it for a second though... Doesn’t it mean he was found by that ass Zagan and slugged in the face or something?”

“...That’s possible. Let’s start by looking for Zagan and the others.”

“Right on.”

The two of them began running down the beach, but Barbatos

turned to look at Chastille, and muttered out quietly.

“...Well, those clothes ain’t bad you know?”

Immediately following that, Chastille fell face first in dramatic fashion, but that’s a different story altogether.



“You said your name was Decarabia, right? You’re a lucky one. I’m in a good mood right now. So I’ll play with you until you’re satisfied,” Zagan declared in good humor as he landed gently on the ground... though it wasn’t clear whether Decarabia could hear him, being completely covered in shattered trees and dirt.

I never thought that watching the romance of others would be so amusing.

Well, if it ended up with them severing ties, it felt like it would end up being rather depressing, so it would probably be better to keep such side shows to a limit, but it truly was unbearably fun.

And just then, Zagan clapped his hands together, having suddenly remembered something.

“But, I guess my subordinate would put it this way, apparently it’s more beautiful to view such vexing matters from a distance affectionately. It’s better not to get in their way.”

If Decarabia were to plunge in there, he would likely have been slaughtered by Barbatos and Chastille. Having only been kicked aside by Zagan, it could even be said that Decarabia was saved. It was to the point where Zagan was hoping for some gratitude.

Decarabia stood back up expressionlessly. Perhaps because he was kicked too strongly, he looked to be in a daze like he didn’t even know where he was.

Hm? His wounds seem to be worse than before?

Without his eye-patch, the area around his pitiful right eye was smeared in blood. Rather than saying his wound from the Sacred Sword had yet to heal, it was more appropriate to think that he had inflicted this on himself.

And just then, Richard and the others came running in.

“Lord Archdemon! We shall assist you!”

“Mm. But keep it quiet. If we cause too much of a ruckus, Chastille and Barbatos won’t be able to keep the mood going. I want to go back to watching them after this.”

Or perhaps he would prefer setting that aside and going back to walking down the beach in a relaxed manner with Nephy at his side. As Zagan gave this matter serious thought, Decarabia seemed to have finally come back to his senses, and leaped into the air with a laugh.

“HYAHAAH! You’ve really gone and done it now ZAGAAAAN! Didn’t I say I’d leave you for later!?”

Decarabia twisted his upper body and let loose his fist like an arrow. And in response, Zagan casually stuck out both his clenched fists straight towards him.

“Don’t be so cold. Aren’t you the one who started fooling around first?”

“Gak!?”

Zagan’s right fist dug right into Decarabia’s face, leaving the Angelic Knights astir.

“His fist connected?”

When they fought earlier in the afternoon, all of Zagan’s punches were easily dodged. The Angelic Knights witnessed this themselves.

Zagan let out a laugh as if he had won the lottery.

“Oh? I got a hit. It’s been a while since I’ve done it, but it went rather well. Maybe I should go teach the brats in Kianoides next time.”

Of the two hands Zagan thrust forward, his left hand collided with Decarabia’s fist, while his right hand dug into his face. This was one of the arts he learned when he was a waif. If there was a certain level of effectiveness even against sorcerers, then it wouldn’t be all that bad to teach the brats in town who would get targeted like the vulpin Kuu.

Blood came spattering out of Decarabia’s nose. However, his face was twisted with a sense of ecstasy.

“Heehee, that’s right. Don’t go puttin’ on airs like that and use some arts ya hear? Show me what you got at your best! HYAHHAHAAAHAH!”

After laughing, Decarabia came to a complete stop.

“But ya know? Why don’tcha use some sorcery? You so weak that you can’t use sorcery no more while usin’ some arts? You ain’t, right? There’s no way my Zagan is that weak, right? You teasin’ me? You bein’ a tease, right? If ya keep teasin’ me, I’ll start teasin’ ya right back, ya know?”

“Don’t say such gross things. This is called the composure of the strong.”

“HYAH! You really are just a tease!” Decarabia then cast his gaze to the side, where Nephys was running towards them. “HEEHEE! She’s your favorite riiiiight!?”

Decarabia broke through the blockade of the Angelic Knights and dashed in straight towards Nephys.

“Mm. She’s my beloved bride. You may treat having been allowed to catch a glimpse of her figure as your life’s greatest treasure.”

Zagan predicted Decarabia’s actions and leaped in the same direction at the same time. He then wrapped his leg around Decarabia’s neck and forced him to the ground.

“GWAH!?”

Decarabia’s neck was crushed and let out a spurt of blood. And

giving him another kick to the head, Decarabia's neck was now bent at an odd angle, yet he stood back up as if he hadn't really received any shock.

"Hak... How... weird... hrrrgh... why won'tcha get serious... grrrrgh... even when I aim... for her?"

Decarabia spoke in a strange voice like he was underwater, then used both his hands to straighten out his neck and regenerate instantly. And Zagan simply replied with a troubled scowl.

"Let's see. This is what you would call compassion. The reason you're brandishing such a defective power could be said to be my responsibility, after all."

Decarabia stared back at him in surprise.

"What?"

"Hm. Where should I even begin? I don't know how self-aware of it you are, but... that reflection sorcery you use is originally something I used."

It was the sorcery the young waif Zagan had used to kill the sorcerer Andras. However, it was nothing more than something created on the spur of the moment by a complete amateur. There were several difficult to cover for flaws in it, so Zagan developed it much further. This was the origin of his ability to devour sorcery.

I could only use reflection sorcery back when I killed this guy.

If he stole Zagan's knowledge back then, it only stood to reason that he was only capable of reflection.

"Huh...?" Decarabia's mouth popped open, as Zagan then continued.

"That sorcery is only capable of reflecting sorcery fired at you. It can't put a stop to physical reinforcement, and it can't block an indirect attack like that of Barbatos' shadow."

Barbatos' original fighting style was an assassination technique where he lurked in his opponent's shadows and stole their life from beneath their feet without allowing any resistance. No matter how much one excelled at martial arts, they would die if suddenly stabbed in the back by a knife.

"Moreover, there's dragon's breath, the fomorian evil eye, and even attacks within dreams by a succubus. You can't block any of these abilities unique to the races. Once your ability has been seen once, it won't work unless it's done by complete surprise."

That's why Gremory and Foll didn't see Decarabia as a threat. They were sorcerers who were considered as Archdemon candidates. They could see a flaw in sorcery at a single glance, and they both likely noticed its relation to Zagan's ability to devour sorcery.

"If I were to use my completed ability to devour sorcerer against your ability to only use such a defective power, wouldn't that just be

simple cowardice?" Zagan then took on a martial arts stance. "That's why I'll face you only using my arts."

Decarabia stood there in a daze as if he didn't hear Zagan at all, but before long, he clapped his hands together having thought of something.

"I don't really get it, but you sayin' that you think you can beat me without usin' sorcery? So in that case, if I get you to use sorcery then it's my win, right!?"

"...Well, I suppose so?"

Zagan never thought that talking to someone who he couldn't really get through to would be so tiring. He couldn't hold back a sigh. In any case, after Zagan confirmed this, Decarabia once more began laughing maniacally.

"Heeheeheaah. Then lemme show you my specialty!"

Decarabia gathered mana into his fist coverings. However, what was giving an even more ominous aura was his silver right eye, now released from its eye-patch. The corrupted mana swept over the area and spurred on an urge to vomit.

So is that artificial eye really a magical apparatus?

The eye may have been supplying him with mana. And while Zagan analyzed that, Decarabia's sorcery was completed.

"HYAHAAH! Blow 'em to bits! Whirlin' Wave!"

A vortex of mana shot out of Decarabia's gauntlet. It was a torrent of power that would reduce any who touched it to atoms. It wasn't any sort of sophisticated sorcery that an Archdemon candidate would use. It was a simple feat of strength that discharged a massive amount of mana. However...

"Ugh... Wh-What is that power...!?"

The Angelic Knights drew back. The amount of mana discharged by that silver eye was colossal. It was to the point where it encroached on the territory of the Sigil of the Archdemon.

Hmph. I was wondering why he hid it by resorting to an eye-patch, but it looks like that was to seal it.

The mana clearly surpassed Decarabia's own abilities. There was no way he was able to control it. He could only unleash it. The mere act of discharging such a vast amount of mana on a regular basis was likely the cause of the deterioration of Decarabia's sanity.

The eye-patch likely also had an effect in protecting him from the curse of the artificial eye, but that eye-patch was gone now. And so, if he were to use martial arts while wielding such power, even an Archdemon would be unable to escape his strike.

Zagan stepped forth towards that sinister power.

"Master Zagan!" Nephry screamed. It was only natural. Just as Zagan declared, this wasn't sorcery, but a simple torrent of

destruction.

And Zagan was walking towards it, without any defenses, incapable of devouring anything, and wasn't even reinforcing his body. He would even fall behind the Angelic Knights without their Anointed Armor as he was now. If he were caught by that torrent of destruction, he would surely be reduced to cinders in but an instant.

And that's precisely why this is humiliating for him.

"Fear not, Nephy. Such child's play one cannot even call sorcery cannot leave even a single scratch on me." Zagan declared with a laugh.

He took a step forward into the vortex.

And the one to shoot their eyes open in surprise... was Decarabia.

Even though he was within that torrent of destruction that should have shattered his body in an instant, Zagan stood there as if it was nothing at all.

And he took another step forward.

The torrent of destruction touched the hem of his yukata and tore it apart like rubbish. But nevertheless, Zagan wasn't perturbed at all, as if this was all but a cool breeze to him.

Mana which is simply running wild is quite crude, after all.

Decarabia's sorcery was something like casting a crudely made net. It was sturdy and covered a wide range, but it had many large holes in it. Zagan was simply advancing forward through the holes located sporadically in the vortex.

This was Decarabia's own sorcery. He surely noticed this as well. And his face was completely frozen with shock.

"Can... you see it...?"

"...? What are you talking about?"

Zagan cocked his head to the side in confusion. But even so, he didn't stop walking. Seeing him do so, Decarabia was now fully convinced.

"Don't play dumb. You can see the flow of mana, right?"

"Any sorcerer is capable of that much, right?"

Zagan had no idea why Decarabia was so surprised. And seeing his exasperation to it all, Decarabia violently shook his head.

"Like hell they can! I got this eye precisely 'cause I couldn't see that crap!"

"Like I care. Doesn't that just mean you weren't suited to become a sorcerer?"

Zagan had no way of knowing it, but this was something that Decarabia could never allow to be said. His eyes shot open so wide it felt like his artificial eye would fall out, and all expression suddenly vanished from his face.

"I'll fuckin' kill you!"

The mana which was dispersed in their surroundings converged on Decarabia's gauntlet. His strike could be said to surpass the strike of even an Archdemon.

I see. With this amount of mana, it's possible he could have toppled at least one Archdemon.

Unfortunately, no matter how hard he tried, that power would never reach Zagan. Decarabia's fist closed in. Unlike when he was countering Zagan's blows, this possessed enough power to reduce him to minced meat with but a touch. The blow couldn't be diverted without touching it, and if Zagan were to trade blows with it like before, his fist would break.

And with that extreme strike coming in at him, Zagan took on a stance for the first time. He quickly lowered his body and thrust his body forward towards Decarabia's chest where the mana was likely least concentrated.

He was walking forward at such a relaxed pace earlier, and now he suddenly dived in. Decarabia lost his target, and his gauntlet missed entirely. However, his eye tumbled about in the next instant and found Zagan closing in on him. And now his left gauntlet was closing in on Zagan.

But you're too late.

Zagan swung his fist faster than Decarabia could. However, the waves of mana coming from Decarabia's gauntlet caused Zagan to slightly lose his posture. Zagan's fist grazed his chin with a thud and just scraped by.

"HYAHAAH! You missed!"

However, just from that scrape, Zagan's fist shattered. His skin split, his muscled broke apart, and even his bones were exposed. With his sorcery canceled, there was no way of stopping the pain, and a sharp shock ran up all the way to his brain.

Decarabia's left fist was closing in. Zagan clenched his teeth, twisted his body, and escaped the gauntlet. He avoided a direct hit, but the mana grazed his back and sent blood flying into the air like a fountain.

But I still dodged it!

Zagan stepped in and swung with his other fist. His punch was basically all he could muster with the last of his strength, but it was far too weak to knock out Decarabia. Moreover...

"What's wrong Zagan!? You can barely call that a punch now can ya!?"

Decarabia used martial arts to begin with. This fist was supposed to be Zagan's last chance, but it was dodged quite simply. It just barely grazed Decarabia's chin.

And even though he missed, he was close enough to just graze

Decarabia's chin. Even his left fist shattered, letting out a horrible sound. Both his fists that could trample over all his enemies up until now were mercilessly reduced to bloody stumps.

Decarabia let out a disappointed sigh.

"Aaah... It's over... I thought you'd be the greatest proof of my strength too..."

Zagan no longer possessed any power with both his arms languidly dangling by his sides. Even if he tried kicking, he couldn't take a proper stance without his arms and the kick would lose any sharpness to it. All was decided. That's why Zagan let out a fearless laugh.

"Yeah. It's over. It's your loss, Decarabia."

"Huh?" Before he could even understand what that meant, Decarabia fell face first into the ground. "Ah... Urgh? What... happened?"

Zagan pointed to his head with his mangled hand.

"You didn't know? You can heal wounds with sorcery. You can also manipulate your brain to erase pain. However, sorcery is unable to heal a shock to the brain."

In other words, it was a cerebral concussion. A strike to the tip of the chin caused the brain to shake and strike against one's own cranium. This was even more intense for shallow strikes which only grazed the chin. Zagan's strikes to the chin struck in from both sides, so Decarabia's brain likely had quite the intense dance in there. The nerves in Decarabia's body were in complete disorder, and he wasn't even able to stand up.

Naturally, he would recover given the time, and given Decarabia's specialty in regeneration this would surely take but a few seconds.

However, a few seconds completely defenseless in front of your enemy is more than enough to get killed.

Zagan picked up a pointed rock with his mangled hand.

"Now then, is the source of your mana that artificial eye? It looks like even a child could gouge it out given something as simple as a pointed rock, huh?"

Decarabia was completely taken aback like he couldn't grasp the current situation. Zagan then swung the rock down aimed right at Decarabia's eye.

"GYAAA—"

He let out a short scream. And then a dull sensation spread throughout his body. Zagan's rock came to a stop right in front of Decarabia's eye.

"Well, I don't mind killing you, but I have a few things to ask before that. You'll give me answers, you hear?"

With that, Zagan lightly cranked his wrist, and the wounds

created by touching Decarabia's mana vanished in an instant, and even his tattered clothes were returned to normal.

It's something Lilith and them went out of their way to prepare for me after all.

Zagan still had enough sense to feel awkward about breaking something that was lent to him. And just then, footsteps began to draw nearer to them.

"Hm? Did you settle things already?"

It was Nephteros. Next to her was Kuroka, with her short swords at the ready, and made to wear a yukata too. Behind them was Gremory, who was carrying Foll on her back. And Michael was with them as well. Just a step behind, Barbatos and Chastille also showed up. Selphy and Lilith weren't present. They were non-combatants to begin with, so they were likely watching over the food.

Zagan returned a light wave to them, then looked down at Decarabia. He should have already recovered from the concussion by now, but it seemed that it was quite humiliating and shocking for him to lose without any sorcery being used on him at all. He showed no signs of trying to get back up.

"Now then, I have tons I want to ask you, but... let's see... How are you still alive?"

"What... are you talking about...?"

"I killed you. I blew away your entire upper body. It wasn't something that you should have been able to regenerate from you know..." Zagan replied in a puzzled tone.

Zagan's powers were still rough around the edges at the time, but he had already far surpassed the abilities of an average sorcerer when it came to reinforcing his body. It was impossible for him to lose against any other sorcerers in a bout of pure strength, and if he was serious, he could change the very terrain of the earth with his punch.

The pitiful bandit who was punched with such power didn't only lose his face, his entire upper body was reduced into bloody chunks and scattered into the air. It was to the point where Zagan himself felt like he had gone too far. That may have been one of the reasons the girl he saved at the time was so shaken up too.

Decarabia looked completely bewildered as he raised his voice.

"The hell are you talkin' about? You gouged out my right eye..."

"Rather than gouging, it'd be more correct to say that nothing was left aside from that artificial eye though?"

"You gouged out my heart..."

"I don't know anything about gouging here, but it's true that your heart went flying along with everything else."

"You killed me!"

"Mm. So why are you alive?"

Decarabia began scratching wildly at his right eye.

“Huh? Then, who... who am I? Who? Who who whowhowhowhooooooooo!?”

Decarabia began rambling incomprehensibly, leaving even Zagan wincing and shrinking back.

Can this guy even keep up a conversation anymore?

Zagan was expecting more of him after getting that clue from Alshiera.

“Wait, Zagan.” Foll jumped down from Gremory’s back and called out to him. And after tottering over, “Zagan, this is cursed.”

“Well, yeah.”

“He’s been eaten by the curse, there’s almost nothing left.”

It meant that it had encroached on his ego to a fatal point.

“...So he’s really useless after all.”

Zagan let out a disappointed sigh, but Foll shook her head.

“But, I can do something about it, maybe.”

“What? Really?”

“Maybe. It might be too late though.”

Decarabia looked up at Foll, and suddenly froze up.

“You... You? I... protect... sister... dead? Killed? Who am I am yooo?”

His cries were already beyond the realm of language and into the realm of incoherent rambling as he rose to his feet.

“Tch, what a troublesome guy.”

Seeing that mana was once more gathering in his gauntlets from his artificial eye, Zagan clenched his fist. However, Foll cut in between them. And after rubbing her sleepy eyes, she stuck out her hand. Only a few people present could understand what happened in the next instant.

Black mana poured out of Foll’s hand. It instantly manifested with mass and transformed into enormous jaws several times Foll’s own height. It was the head of a massive dragon.

“Black Dragon Marbas.”

That was the name Foll spoke. Her original form was that of a dragon with beautiful green fur. And what manifested here was a sinister looking pitch black dragon, the Black Dragon Marbas, the evil dragon who was passed down in Liucaon legend. The calamity that previously manifested when the curse of a dragon and an Archdemon were mixed together. These were its dregs.



“Ah...”

Decarabia couldn't even let out a scream and was swallowed by the dragon's jaws. The sorcerer known as Decarabia was truly consigned to oblivion in a single bite, just as Foll had said.



The girl had a single older brother. He was awkward, a little crafty, but nevertheless, he was an older brother who was only ever kind to the girl.

The siblings had no relatives and lived a life where they scrounged for food in the garbage they found in the alleyways of the city. But even so, her brother was educated. He could read. He even taught her how to read just a little and gave her a picture book that he stole from somewhere as a present.

The picture book became her treasure. She would read it aloud proudly to the other homeless children, and the girl immersed herself in the world of the picture book.

And on a certain day, her brother became a sorcerer.

He lost an eye, and had a creepy artificial eye in its place, but her brother was still kind. He got her pretty clothes, fed her delicious meals, and even gave her a house to live in. She was even able to clean herself and was given the happiness of a 'normal' person.

However, for some reason she was never allowed into her brother's room. She was no longer able to go meet with the children she grew up with in the streets, but even so, she was grateful to her brother. Once in a while, the children who were worried about her would come to visit, so she wasn't lonely. They laughed at her saying that she looked like a completely different person though.

However, after that passed for some time, her brother became strange. He would shut himself into his room, and there were times when he wouldn't show himself before her even when she called out to him. When they met once in a while, he would start scratching his right eye to the point where he drew blood, and a nasty scent came from his room that stunk of corrupted gold and blood.

Unable to bear it any longer, the girl waited for her brother to go out and entered his room. What she found... was hell.

An entire wall was smeared with rotten blood and meat. There was a massive bed in the middle of the room with indescribable tools scattered all around it.

And on the bed were the bodies of dead children with anguished expressions still on their faces. She could tell that these were the waifs who came to visit her. And just then, her brother came back. The girl ran away screaming in tears.

However, her brother chased her.

She escaped into the nearby forest, but was caught.

“Even you would betray me?” Her brother screamed.

He tore apart her clothes and assaulted her.

‘Aah, so my life ends here,’ she thought.

And just then, a single young man showed up. He glared at her brother like he was filth, and mercilessly killed him as if swatting away a bug. All that was left of her brother was the lower half of his body leaning over her. Her brother had left this world. And then...



“...Geh, yucky.”

Foll spat a human body out of the black dragon’s mouth, and Zagan gently stroked his beloved daughter’s back.

“Hey, is your stomach alright? Don’t put weird things in your mouth.”

“Zagan, so overprotective.”

Foll then spat something else out from the black dragon’s mouth. What rolled on the ground with a light sound was the artificial silver eye.

“Foll, did you break down just the curse inside the black dragon?”

“Mm. This is a curse to begin with, so I thought it could maybe eat just the curse... But, it’s really yucky.”

“...That’s pretty amazing... but you shouldn’t do it anymore.”

“I also don’t want to.”

Zagan looked down at the human spat out by the black dragon. He had lost his silver eye, his mantle was gone, and the ominous bandages wrapped around him were undone. It even looked like his body was a size smaller than before. But nevertheless, it appeared that he was alive, and broke into an intense coughing fit.

“Ugh... ah... Za... gan...?”

Nevertheless, he called out to Zagan the moment he noticed him. So Zagan gently brushed Foll’s head.

“Well done. You did great, Foll. Seems he regained enough of his mind to have a conversation.”

Having said that, it was suspicious whether he was even aware of what just happened to his body. After being praised, Foll smiled broadly just like a child and gripped Zagan’s hand which was petting her. She then rubbed it against her head even more.

Is this maybe the first time I’ve seen Foll so happy?

After petting his beloved daughter, Zagan finally noticed the irregularity before him.

“Huh? Could this guy be...”

Decarabia’s body shrunk. Zagan thought he was somewhat

dissolved within the black dragon, but that wasn't the case. His naked body was dainty, and his waist was slender. Above all else, he now had breasts that shouldn't have been present on a man.

Decarabia was actually a girl?

Zagan immediately denied that thought. Even he could tell the difference between sexes at a single glance. Decarabia's lanky skeletal frame was that of a man, and he had an Adam's apple in his throat. Sorcery could change one's muscular structure quite a bit during reinforcement, but it wouldn't make breasts go away or anything. In other words, the Decarabia that Zagan defeated and the one collapsed here were physically different people.

"What's going on? Does the curse of that artificial eye even change one's sex?"

A curse was a calamity that couldn't be measured on the simple scales of sorcery. It could even change someone from a child to an adult and vice versa, so it wasn't all that weird to be able to change one's sex, but at this point the only commonality was the color of their hair. There was far too much change here.

No... maybe the artificial eye itself is what created the sorcerer known as 'Decarabia' to begin with?

In that case, it would explain how the bandit that Zagan killed showed up before him once more. But then who was this girl? At the very least, she wasn't the bandit Decarabia that Zagan killed before. However, when he went to take a look at her face, he couldn't see it clearly because of the saliva and dirt which stained it.

"Huh...? Hang on..."

But precisely because she was so dirty, Zagan felt like he recognized her. And so, he spoke in a tone like he couldn't believe it himself.

"It can't be... are you... Stella?"

It was the name of one of the waifs who hung out with Zagan and Marc. However, that's what convinced him too.

Both me and Stella learned arts from Marc...

It was inevitable then that their styles would be similar; Zagan didn't know of anyone else who learned those arts.

The girl looked up at Zagan with an empty gaze.

"Ste... la...? Ugh..." She pinned down her head and squirmed about. "Stella...? Me...? Then... my brother...? Who... am I...?"

"H-Hey! Stella! Keep it together!"

Zagan was left completely confused.

Brother? Sister...? It couldn't be... Decarabia and Stella were siblings?

But in that case, who was the Decarabia who was standing before Zagan moments ago? A daughter...?

Stella stretched out her hand as if imploring him for something.

“Zagan... save...”

And just as he was about to grasp her hand...

“My my, as expected of the Archdemon Zagan! Even the one who defeated Archdemon Andrealphus is nothing before you, huh!? Mm! I totally believed that you would win!”

The one giving completely barefaced praise while clapping his hands in an exaggerated manner was none other than Michael. Stella reflexively looked over to him and suddenly cradled her shoulders while trembling.

“Ah... A-A-A-Aaaaaah... No way... Teacher...”

Michael stuck up his index finger while shaking his head.

“Oh? I don’t think I ever had a cute little girly like yourself as a student or an attendant or anything, you know? But whatever, it’s the duty of an Archangel to guide such lost maidens too.”

A sharp metal ringing suddenly reverberated in the air. Michael had drawn his Sacred Sword before anyone noticed, and its blade was now vibrating in the air. Zagan had repelled it with his fist. After throwing down his clothes onto Stella’s shoulders, Zagan was suddenly wearing his usual robes.

It was the same sorcery he had used when he was turned into a child. He then stood before Stella and Foll as if to cover them.

“Foll. I’ll leave her to you. It just may be that she’s someone precious to me right behind you and Nephy.”

“...Mm. I’ll do my best.”

After verifying that his daughter gave him a reassuring nod, Zagan glared at Michael, who simply shrugged his shoulders without showing a hint of timidity.

“Hey now, cut the jokes will you? Didn’t I tell you already I have no intention of tangling with you?”

“Shut it. Just how long do you plan on keeping up that shameless farce, Michael? Or should I call you this instead... Archdemon Andrealphus?”

“Wha...!?”

Several surprised voices rang out at once. The Angelic Knights were all frozen with shock, and Chastille was shaking her head like she couldn’t believe it at all.

“Please wait, Zagan. There’s no mistaking that this man is Archangel Michael. I guarantee it.”

“I bet he is then. However, this guy has another title.”

“And you’re saying my second title is Archdemon?” Michael said with a chuckle, “Don’t be stupid. There’s no way a Sacred Sword would pick an Archdemon, right? Besides, Andrealphus was killed by Decarabia over there, right?”

“Give me that kind of ridiculous excuse only after you’ve put some

effort in hiding it.” Zagan thrust out a finger at Michael. “After Marchosias died, you became the head of the twelve Archdemons. Did you think I would forget your face after seeing it when I inherited the Sigil of the Archdemon?”

“Hmm. I see. You’re just as bold as ever. I feel like you’ve gotten even gutsier since becoming an Archdemon.”

Just as Michael replied, suffocating mana flooded the area. And on Andrealphus’ right hand was a Sigil of the Archdemon, just like Zagan’s.

“No way... Impossible...” Chastille groaned despondently.

“Claiming something is impossible is simply abandoning any thought. It’s negligent to use such a word as one of the Archangels who form the counterparts of the Archdemons, Chastille.”

“If I loosen my guard, I’ll get killed.” The moment Chastille’s instinct told her that, she held her Sacred Sword at the ready. There was an overwhelming pressure here that felt like it could cover the entire island. Zagan however simply ignored it as something boring and lightly swung his fist as if batting away an insect.

And with a sharp clang, the pressure over the island dispersed. The light had vanished from both Andrealphus’ and Zagan’s sigils.

“I thought I told you to stop your shameless farce, Andrealphus.”

“...Hey now, you just spoiled all my effort in putting on a big dramatic atmosphere here.” The overwhelming pressure vanished completely, and in a complete turn, Andrealphus simply scratched his head as if this was all simply tiresome. “Well, don’t be so angry. Lemme just tell you now that I haven’t lied at all okay? Indeed, I didn’t plan anything, since it was all too troublesome. It’s also true that guy killed the one who was acting as the Archdemon Andrealphus.”

Zagan squinted his eyes.

“A homunculus?”

“Bingo.”

Just as he wondered how one person could hold the title of both Archangel and Archdemon, it turned out the role of the Archdemon was left to a homunculus he made as a duplicate of himself.

Though it seems the one I met that time was the real deal.

Nephteros bit down on her lips. It wasn’t enough to completely shake her, but it surely wasn’t something she liked listening to.

“There’s about a one in a thousand chance that some mutation will occur when you make a homunculus you see? So there are cases where one is born with an ego. Well, I left the role of the Archdemon up to him, but it seems Decarabia’s discipline was out of his reach... he was actually quite talented too.”

It was complete nonsense that an Archdemon would seek retribution for another, but the fact that this man chased Decarabia may have been about revenge in a certain sense.

“Tch, so you’re saying you had no intent to antagonize me? Then why did you bring Decarabia here?” Zagan replied.

Decarabia didn’t possess any sorcery to leap over space. However, no ships came anywhere close to the island. Zagan had already checked that nobody was present on this island when he arrived. So in that case, just how did Decarabia arrive?

“Oh come on, how did I end up being the one who brought him over? My ship got sunk and I ended up drifting here too you know?”

“And I didn’t hear anything about who else was on that ship.”

His boat was the only one to draw near to this island other than the one Zagan’s group used. And so, Andrealphus shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

“Oops, guess I forgot about that. I was the only one moving the ship, but I feel like maybe there was someone else riding along.”

His roundabout phrasing irritated Zagan. It was certainly true that this man hadn’t lied, but he didn’t tell them the whole truth either. He was the same as Alshiera in that regard.

“You bastard...”

“Hang on now, it’s not fair that you’re the only ones getting to ask questions here. Haven’t you heard of paying respect to your elders?” Andrealphus then turned to Foll. “By the way, little dragon. You guys had a fishing competition, right?”

“We did. What about it?”

Andrealphus then put on a sociable smile.

“I started late, but I’m participating too. My catch was that Decarabia over there. How was it? Don’t you think I fished up the best prey?”

Foll turned to look at Stella behind her, and after pretending to think it over it for a while, she returned a small nod.

“It really was the most... horrible tasting one.”

Andrealphus nodded in satisfaction.

“So, that’s how it is. Doesn’t that mean I have a right to the prize too?”

“Hmm. So what do you wish for? Just try saying it.”

Zagan knew full well what his answer would be; there was no need to ask, but he did nonetheless. And Andrealphus put on an impudent smile as if anticipating that.

“I’d like you to return my disciple over there to me. I’ve spent quite a bit of time on her.”

I see, not a student or an attendant... but a disciple.

It was certainly true that he hadn’t lied. Students and disciples

were similar, but disciples implied that they were being taught one's characteristic sorcery. Zagan gave a glance over to Stella who started trembling violently with a start, then replied with a smile.

"I refuse."

"...Thought so..."

That was the last they had to say, and also the signal for the battle to begin. Zagan clenched his fists. Andrealphus gripped his Sacred Sword. And the two Archdemons stepped forth.



A metallic echo rang in the air continuously. It looked like the two Archdemons were simply glaring each other down without moving a muscle. But even so, blinding sparks were constantly flying about between them.

Heaven's Scale was already wrapped around Zagan's fist, and each time sparks went flying in the air, his fist appeared hazy. Zagan's fist and Andrealphus' Sacred Sword were continuously clashing.

Andrealphus brought his Sacred Sword straight down at Zagan, and Zagan used the back of his fist to strike the flat of the sword. Zagan then aimed his fist right at Andrealphus' face, which was quickly blocked by his sword.

Having struck Heaven's Scale twice, even the Sacred Sword had cracks running along its edge. However, it consumed the mana around them to immediately restore itself. Andrealphus moved to strike with a horizontal sweep once more, and Zagan blocked and returned the strike in kind, once more sending sparks flying into the air.



Both of them were simply scoping the other out, only using a single hand to fight. That was exactly why it looked like they weren't moving to those watching them. And with their exchange of offense and defense still going on, Andrealphus let out a bored voice.

"Hey Zagan. This is what we call pointless repetition. It'll never end like this you know?"

"You've already seen the hands I have to play while I haven't seen anything yet. I'll be somewhat careful about it."

"Oh, you're right, aren't you? But it's not like I set Decarabia on you 'cause I wanted to see what you could do you know? How 'bout I show you one of my hands as an apology?"

Andrealphus brought his attacks to a stop and gripped the blade of his own Sacred Sword, causing blood to flow along the blade.

"Now then, it's been quite some time. Sing to your heart's content."

Zagan put his fists up at the ready.

Is that the Sacred Sword's spiritual power?

Just like how Chastille could manipulate light, and how Raphael could manipulate flames, this man was also capable of releasing the Sacred Sword's power. And so, just what extent of power could an Archdemon draw from a Sacred Sword? Zagan vigilantly put himself on guard, and was left completely dumbfounded in the next instant.

"Angelic Confession — Zachariel."

Black light surged out of the Sacred Sword. The trembling blade gave off a sound like someone playing a wind instrument. It should have sounded rather ominous, but it was a melody which was somehow calming to the heart. The black light didn't assault Zagan, but instead wrapped around Andrealphus' body.

"Take a good look, Chastille. It's been two hundred years since this has been used in this world. Even Raphael wasn't able to reach this stage. This is the final form of the Sacred Sword."

What eventually manifested was a sinister yet beautiful set of armor adorned with wings. Its size easily doubled that of Andrealphus himself, who was quite tall to begin with. Its gauntlets looked large enough to grasp a human body in each hand, and it was gripping an enormous spear made of light. Its form seemed somehow female. The set of armor made of light appeared transparent and overlapped with Andrealphus' body.

Andrealphus pulled a striking wooden box out of his Anointed Armor. It seemed that he filched it from their luggage without asking. It was a new box of wrapped tobacco. He took one out, crudely bit off the end and spat it out, put it in his mouth, lit the tip with sorcery, and let out a satisfied puff of smoke.

“There’s a lot called seraphs locked up inside each of the Sacred Swords. Well, they’re basically something like a living pillar.”

“Seraphs...?”

Even Zagan had never heard of such beings.

But that may just be the secret behind the power of the Sacred Swords...

Even when Nephy carved the same Celestian words that were on the Sacred Swords, she was unable to bestow anything with as much power as the originals.

“There are monsters in this world that we call demons, you should’ve fought against them once or twice already now. They’re a lot that someone at the level of an Archangel can only just defeat by trading their life. You ever wonder why the world hasn’t ended yet despite that?”

“Are you saying those so called seraphs have been fighting them?”

“Seems so? At the very least, that’s what old man Marchosias said.”

Hearing the preceding Archdemon’s name once more, Zagan squinted his eyes.

Marchosias again? That name’s been following me around ever since I came to Atlastia...

Although, if Marchosias had said that, then as the one who was involved with demons one thousand years ago, it was likely the truth. Moreover, Zagan had faintly felt that was the case. There was *something* paranormal in this world like the gods and devils of legend. Demons, which were befitting of the image of devils, truly existed. In that case, there should have been something out there which conformed to the image of gods.

It was truly vexing that all who knew about it, be it Marchosias or the Wise Dragon Orobas, were all already dead before he could ask them.

“But why is there no record of seraphs ever existing? If they possessed such power, there should be some sort of record of them.”

“Aah, about that...” Andrealphus replied with a look of exasperation and a bitter smile, “Old man Marchosias obliterated them down to their very roots.”

“What!?”

“Seems he had quite the grudge. He completely and utterly wiped them out until there wasn’t even proof that they existed left anymore. That’s why I can’t really answer you if you ask me what exactly these seraphs are either. I’m not lying, you hear?”

Even if he can’t answer me precisely, he must have a clue...

He wanted to ask, but as long as Andrealphus was talking about it the way he was, it was plain as day that he would just dodge the

question. Andrealphus simply laughed to imply that he had no intention of telling Zagan any more.

“Oops, my bad. We went off topic there. Anyways, this Sacred Sword has a seraph locked inside it. What we call Confession is the ultimate form of the Sacred Sword where an Angelic Knight dons the seraph itself.” After explaining that much, Andrealphus flicked away his still lit smoke. “Now then, that’s enough downtime. You better not kick the bucket from this as an active duty Archdemon, you hear?”

And the seraph brought down its spear of light. Zagan grasped his mantle with both hands and looked up at the seraph in admiration.

“I see... You don it, huh? That seraph or whatever you call it may unexpectedly stretch out to the same point that sorcery does.”

The spear of light came down, and that black light came to a stop but a hair away from Zagan’s head.

“Heaven’s Scale Western Sky.”

Zagan’s left arm was wrapped in a massive gauntlet made of mana. It extended from his shoulder and was about the same size as Andrealphus’ Confession. It was a left arm made entirely of Heaven’s Scale. That left arm had grabbed the Confession’s spear and brought it to a stop. And since this spell took on the shape of a left arm, there was obviously another...

“Heaven’s Scale Eastern Sky.”

A massive gauntlet made of mana took shape on Zagan’s right side.

The completed form of Heaven’s Scale is Dragon Form, but it’s too exaggerated a technique to use against an individual person.

The power discharged by Dragon Form was too grand. Just destroying a single target would also destroy everything in the vicinity. It wasn’t well suited for destroying a small target. Above all else, it wouldn’t be able to keep up with this man’s speed. This was a form of Heaven’s Scale that Zagan devised for fighting exactly such opponents. The Western Sky blocked the spear. As such, the Eastern Sky was free to act.

“Here we go, don’t you die on me either, you hear?”

The fist of the Eastern Sky came crashing in. Andrealphus let out an amused whistle and held up the Confession’s left arm. Black light gathered around it, taking on the shape of a shield, intercepting the Eastern Sky. And so, the destructive power they were capable of was...

“So it’s even...”

“...Seems so.”

With the opening created by Zagan’s right fist diving in, the spear of light slipped out of the Western Sky’s grasp. Andrealphus’ sword was replaced by a spear, and Zagan’s fist was replaced with a gauntlet. And their previous exchange of clashes repeated. The speed was the

same as before, but the scale of destruction was far greater. Nephy and the others were no longer able to stay near and retreated.

And just then, Andrealphus spoke out in a meddlesome manner as if to spur on Zagan.

“What a blunder. Or maybe it’s just incomplete? You went out of your way to shape it after a human’s hand, so you should’ve at least made a weapon too.”

Zagan’s right fist which was colliding with the shield was fine, but the left arm which was blocking the spear was starting to show cracks. Even the toughest armor would start to break apart if repeatedly struck by a sword. It was only inevitable for the Eastern and Western Sky to eventually break as long as they were just shaped to mimic arms while being assaulted by that spear. However, Zagan let out a snort as if all this was no big deal.

“Do you have holes for eyes? These are barehanded because they don’t need something like a weapon at all.”

It was true that the Confession’s spear was scarring the Eastern and Western Sky, but by the time the spear came in for another strike, the scar was already regenerated. The sorcery known as Heaven’s Scale was one which devoured all power in the vicinity *ad infinitum* and transformed it into a sturdy shield. The aura of a Sacred Sword was not exempt from this. The Heaven’s Scale was absorbing the Confession’s aura and regenerating itself.

Now realizing that his own power was being devoured, a look of delight flashed across Andrealphus’ face.

“Haahaa. I see. I get why Orias hesitated to make you an Archdemon now! So you can devour both Archdemons and Archangels, huh? Oooh, how scary.”

Even though Zagan was devouring both his mana and aura, the Confession showed no signs of weakening. On the contrary, the spear of light looked to be filled with even more power, and carved a massive fissure in the earth. Its tip could already reach all the way to the edge of the beach, and if he were to cast it into the water, it would send a wave blowing over like a second attack. This island would surely sink in no time if he were to do so.

“Are they both just goddamn monsters here...?” Barbatos groaned. However, Zagan coldly replied.

“This is my domain. It would be a loss if this island were to sink. You don’t mind dying already do you?”

“Don’t be that way. You may have forgotten, but my primary occupation is that of a sorcerer, you know?”

Confession was his power as an Archangel. This man had yet to display his power as an Archdemon. And just then, Chastille screamed out.

“Zagan, the ground!”

And Zagan finally realized it upon hearing her shout. Before he knew it, a massive magic circle was carved into the ground with Andrealphus at its center.

He drew a magic circle with the tip of his spear while attacking!?

He wasn't just swinging around his black spear meaninglessly, its tip had drawn a large magic circle emitting black light.

But, sorcery I can devour.

That was supposed to be the case, but Andrealphus wagged his finger in the air.

“Whoa, can you really now?”

And Andrealphus' sorcery activated. It was likely some grand sorcery appropriate to one named an Archdemon.

But I devoured it!

Andrealphus' sorcery was broken down, became Zagan's food, and was now wrapped around Zagan's arm. He certainly felt that all happen...

But suddenly, Zagan's chest split open.

“What... the...?”

He was unable to hide his discomposure.

Impossible... I really devoured it!

As proof of that, Zagan's mana was amplified in proportion to what he absorbed.

“Oh? How mysterious. It worked. Maybe it wasn't sorcery, huh?”

Hearing Andrealphus say that, both Nephy and Nephteros gulped down.

“It couldn't be... Celestial mysticism...?”

“There's no way. I mean, he's human, right?”

Celestial mysticism was a miracle which could only be used by high elves. If humans were capable of using it, then Bifrons wouldn't have created Nephteros in the first place.

Zagan then looked down at his own wound.

The wound itself... is from the Sacred Sword...?

Just how did it slip past his ability to devour sorcery and the Heaven's Scale? Zagan pinned down his wound. He was using sorcery to heal it, but the wound itself wouldn't close. This also happened when Chastille had cut him; the Sacred Sword's aura obstructed sorcery from doing anything.

Blood splattered to the ground, creating a red pool at his feet. Zagan had no chance of winning unless he was able to unravel the secret before he fell to a knee.

The sorcery was woven by that magic circle at his feet, right?

Since it was carved using the aura of a Sacred Sword, simple sorcery would be unable to destroy it.

“Eastern Sky.”

Zagan used the Western Sky to shield himself from the Confession’s spear while driving the Eastern Sky down directly from above.

Heaven’s Scale can even absorb the Sacred Sword’s aura.

That was supposed to be the case...

“Whoa, I can’t let you do that—Zachariel!”

A black light poured out of the Sacred Sword itself and repelled the Eastern Sky.

So he can wield the Sacred Sword even while manipulating the Confession?

Moreover, there was the mysterious sorcery that he was unable to devour. It was like taking on three enemies at the same time.

“Now then, that’s all the time you get to think it over. Let’s continue.”

Zagan brought both the Western and Eastern Sky together as if to fortify his defenses.

It’s definitely sorcery, I really did devour something. The problem is the fact that I devoured it but it still activated.

“Take this!”

Andrealphus’ sorcery activated once more.

“Urgh!?”

And once more, blood spurted out of Zagan’s body.

Not yet!

His ability to devour sorcery was functioning normally. Heaven’s Scale wasn’t broken either. Or rather, both were filled with even more power.

So he’s coming in contact?

Andrealphus made a show of tapping his Sacred Sword against his shoulder.

“Isn’t it about time you give up? It’s pretty impressive that you took that attack twice and are still standing. You’re probably already the top of all current Archdemons when it comes to pure toughness, you know?”

The second strike deeply gouged the right side of Zagan’s abdomen. It was causing an even larger amount of blood to pour out than the first strike.

The first was a slash. The second... a thrust?

The fact that he couldn’t heal the wounds meant that it was something caused by the Sacred Sword or the Confession.

In other words, the sorcery itself isn’t a means of attack.

It was sorcery which induced an awfully troublesome phenomenon. And being given such a friendly warning, Zagan made a show of striking the wound in his abdomen.

“You’re being awfully gentle here.”

“Damn straight. Aren’t old geezers meant to raise the youngsters with promising futures?”

“That’s unwanted consideration. I get the general gist of it.”

Andrealphus’ raised a brow.

“Hmmm. Doesn’t look like you’re bluffing. Okay, this time I’m not gonna hold back the slash, got it?”

Andrealphus replied as if implying that was a hint, to which Zagan replied with a strained smile.

“I’m telling you that’s unwanted consideration. Holding back is something the strong tell the weak.”

Zagan replied haughtily, conversely making Andrealphus smile happily.

“How nice. Youngsters needs to be at least that energetic.”

Andrealphus took the box of tobacco from his pocket.

“Whoops, that’s the last one, huh...? Hey, do you smoke?”

“No. I won’t smoke anything that seems like it’ll make my bride’s meals taste worse.”

“Well that’s unfortunate. You’re missing out on half of life here... You can just puff out all the bad feelings after doing some bloody work you see. If you win, I’ll hand this over.”

“I’m telling you I don’t want it.”

“Now now, just shut up and try it at least once. Here...”

Andrealphus tossed the box over. And at the same time, both Archdemons kicked off the ground. The magic circle at Andrealphus’ feet shined, and his mysterious sorcery activated.

The principle of devouring sorcery is drawing a magic circle identical to your opponent’s.

By weaving the exact same magic circle but a fraction of a second behind the other, it was possible to hijack the flow of mana. That was the principle behind Zagan’s power, and also the basic theory behind Decarabia’s ability to reflect sorcery. However, what would happen if it occurred too late? What would happen if the original sorcery finished activating in that fraction of a second before he hijacked the flow?

That’s why Zagan copied the magic circle even faster than before. He did so faster than what it would take to reflect the sorcery, faster than what it would take it hijack it. Faster even than Andrealphus himself. He stole Andrealphus’ sorcery before even absorbing it. And so, Zagan and Andrealphus activated their sorcery at the same time.

“Wh-Wha...?”

When Zagan tried to speak, his voice wouldn’t properly come out.

“Hmm. So you really saw through it completely after only seeing it twice. Pretty impressive.”

He could tell this was telepathic communication. They were in a world devoid of color. And everything, the box of cigars in the air, Nephys gulping down, Chastille gripping her Sacred Sword looking for an opening, the fluttering foliage of the tree branches overhead, had all come to a stop. If there was one way of explaining this phenomenon...

“Time Stop... That’s your sorcery!?”

And Andrealphus made a bitter smile.

“Well, it’s not like it really stopped or anything. Time is still flowing, just a little at a time. It’s the two of us who have been accelerated you see. One second’s become half an hour for us, give or take.”

It was a world which functioned at eighteen thousandths of a second. Zagan’s ability to devour sorcery took one tenth of a second and would be too slow.

Andrealphus brought the Confession at the ready.

“Well then, let’s settle this already.”

“Agreed. I’m in the middle of a vacation here.”

Zagan’s Eastern and Western Sky were still functioning just like Andrealphus’ Confession was. From here, it would be a pure match between sword and fist.

“So I say, but I don’t like the idea of going second when it’s my sorcery at play here. Here we go!”

Andrealphus was the first to take action. With a single oppressive step, he split the earth even more than before. However, Zagan had also advanced by that time. He opened his fist and held the palm of the Western Sky in front of it. The Confession’s black spear came straight at him and collided with the Western Sky, causing cracks to form in Zagan’s defenses along with a dull sensation. The tip of the spear pierced through the Western Sky and closed in on Zagan.

Heaven’s Scale was broken!?

This was the first time it happened since Raphael had done so. However, the Confession’s spear also came to a stop.

“Not bad! But I still have this—Zachariel!”

A black light poured out of the Sacred Sword and came in with a horizontal slash.

However, it’s not as powerful as the Confession!

Zagan directed the Eastern Sky towards it.

“Stop it, Eastern Sky!”

And even as the blade cut through the gauntlet, it managed to splendidly catch the sword.

“Tch, seriously?”

Even though he sounded perturbed, Andrealphus was still an Archdemon. He immediately let go of his Sacred Sword and once more called to the Confession.

“But now you’re out of hands to play, do it—Confession!”

The Confession released the black spear and used it’s remaining arm wielding a shield to perform a ramming attack. With both his Western and Eastern Sky used up, Zagan was now defenseless, but nevertheless, Zagan had a smile on his face.

“You’ve chosen a poor move, Andrealphus.”

Now that the Confession was no longer holding the black spear, the Western Sky was able to devour it in its entirety. And with all of its damage repaired by the aura it gained from doing so, it was able to regain all of its functionality.

“Capture that bitch, Western Sky!”

It was actually the Confession who was now defenseless. With the Western Sky coming in on its flank, it had nothing it could do to stop it. Andrealphus’ voice even had a tinge of admiration to it.

“Splendid. But, you’re missing the decisive blow.”

Even though Zagan broke through Andrealphus’ techniques, both the Eastern and Western Sky were now sealed. And this man was capable of manipulating the Confession while wielding his Sacred Sword; he was more than capable of fighting without either. He took a leap back out of the range of the Eastern and Western Sky.

“A decisive blow? I have one right here.”

Zagan replied fearlessly to Andrealphus.

You’re not the only one who can fight, you know?

Zagan exhausted both the Eastern and Western Sky to seal the Sacred Sword and the Confession. And in his hands was all the mana he had absorbed from devouring sorcery up until now.

“Guh!!”

Zagan left fist went flying in. Andrealphus’ Anointed Armor shattered like glass. The sensations of ribs breaking and entrails exploding was passed to Zagan’s hand.

“Ga... hak...”

And what awaited Andrealphus’ head, now keeled over and spitting out blood, was Zagan’s right fist.

“It’s been quite a long time since I did this seriously. You’re supposed to be the strongest, right?”

Zagan drove his right fist into Andrealphus’ face. Color returned to the world. The frozen scenery began moving again. Andrealphus went flying face up and smashed through the trees of the forest.

Everyone who was watching the fight opened their eyes in shock, unable to understand what happened, as the foliage gently fell to the ground.

And as all that happened, Zagan held his right hand out into the air, right where the box of cigars fell. Zagan took out the last smoke, and imitated Andrealphus’ actions in biting off the tip. He placed it in

his mouth, snapped his fingers, and took a puff.

Red hot ash fell from the tip, and a violent stimulus ran through his chest as he inhaled the smoke. It was the first time he ever experienced such a stimulus, and it gave him a sense of exaltation that he found difficult to describe. And after enjoying that sensation for a while, he puffed out the smoke.

“I see. This isn’t bad, but it really isn’t something to have before meal.”

And thus, things were settled between Zagan and the strongest Archangel, who also served as the strongest Archdemon.



Epilogue

“This King’s Silver Eye is something I created, you see,” Andrealphus said as he picked up the artificial eye Foll spat out. “Well, I’m sure you already have a clue, but this is a replica of something I was researching, and a failure of a magic tool.”

Zagan held his hand out in front of his face.

Silver eye... huh?

The Silver-Eyed King, and the King’s Silver Eye which rivaled the power of the Sigils of the Archdemon. The commonality between the two was the color of the eyes.

Is this also related to Marc?

And how did chasing after Marc connect to Azazel? Zagan endured this haze of thoughts with a sigh as Andrealphus looked over to Stella.

“Well, since my research failed, this thing got considerably cursed, but a couple years ago one of my subordinates stole it and ran off. And I have no clue how it happened, but it fell into the hands of a bandit named Decarabia.”

“And he was killed by me.”

Precisely because he was nothing more than a novice sorcerer, it was easy to see why he would only look like a bandit. Andrealphus nodded at Zagan.

“But, that only made the curse in this thing more troublesome. Maybe because he was swallowed by the curse, or maybe because his broken mind surpassed the curse itself, the artificial eye ended up absorbing Decarabia’s personality.”

Zagan looked down at Stella’s face. She had Zagan’s yukata on her shoulders. Her face was covered by her bangs, but he could still see her right eye was missing entirely. Andrealphus looked at her with pity and continued his explanation.

“The artificial eye took hold of that girl and began to remake her body into that of Decarabia’s... Well, this is something that began with my failure. I thought I had to do something to fix it, but all I could do was slow down the encroachment of the curse.”

That was surely what the eye-patch and bandages were for. There was likely none other than the Archdemons who could seal a massive curse that approached the Sigils of the Archdemon in power.

“Well, those are the circumstances here. The curse suddenly got

worse when I was out of the castle, my body double got killed, and I ended up here while chasing Decarabia. Coincidentally, I heard about you breaking through some nasty curse yourself. So I thought if luck was on my side, you'd be able to somehow do something about it."

How impudent.

Andrealphus would have grasped onto the fact that Zagan was cursed around the time he went to Orias for help. A meeting between two Archdemons was a threat which could shake the foundations of the world. He was likely monitoring Zagan's movements since then.

In any case, they may have been too late in undoing the curse. Stella was still blankly staring into space, and she wouldn't react in any meaningful way when they called out to her. Andrealphus looked down at her with a heartbroken expression, and tilted his head to the side.

"So, those are my circumstances. Anyways, why didn't you kill me?"

There was a pitch black fist mark in Andrealphus' face, but Zagan didn't go as far as killing him. It was entirely possible in that situation for him to send Andrealphus' head flying.

"How did it go again...? Oh yeah. Pay respect to your elders, was it? You held back plenty against me, so all I did was pay respect to that."

Andrealphus had plenty of time to move all he wanted in that frozen world. There was no need to stop at a single slash like he did. It was entirely feasible for him to strike Zagan down the first time he activated his sorcery.

"Man, you really aren't cute at all, you brat." Andrealphus paused, then put on a serious expression and said, "But, you get it now, right? Your ability to devour sorcery is too convenient. You'll get defeated by means you shouldn't lose to, you know?"

What a meddlesome ass.

Devouring sorcery was a power that could be practically considered as invincible against sorcery, but it also meant that he devoured sorcery before he learned what it was. Zagan's ability to see through the structure of another sorcery in an instant and imitate it should have made it possible for Zagan to steal the sorcery itself. Just like how he stole Andrealphus' Time Stop sorcery.

Andrealphus went out of his way to stop at a single strike each time just to teach him that. And just how did Andrealphus interpret Zagan's expression just now?

"In truth, this kinda thing is supposed to be taught to you by your teacher. But you became a sorcerer through sheer effort. That's terrifying in its own sense, but there's a limit to what you can gain on your own. That's why I advise you get a teacher now while you can."

“And are you saying I should become your damned disciple?”

Zagan glared back at Andrealphus, who simply raised his hands in the air in surrender.

“I’ll excuse myself from taking on a troublesome disciple like you... Although, this in itself might just be unneeded meddling from me after all this.”

Andrealphus cast his gaze over to Gremory and Barbatos.

Well, creating new sorcery with others wasn’t all that bad either...

They may not have been teachers, but he had people with him learning sorcery at his side. Andrealphus put on a slightly strained smile, then looked over to Stella.

“I already have a demanding disciple in my charge here you see. I don’t have the leisure to take on more.” And of all things to do, Andrealphus bowed his head. “That’s how it is. Sorry, but could you return my disciple to me? I promise I won’t treat her poorly.”

“...You’re not screwing with me... right?”

If he was, there was no way an Archdemon would lower their head.

Zagan was left at a loss.

Of the three brats who hung around each other, one became an Archdemon, one holds some sort of secret, and one became the disciple of an Archdemon...

Just what was happening between the three of them? Stella was a clue to all of this.

Above all else, she’s something like an older sister to me.

If Marc was his older brother, Stella was his older sister. There was no way he could abandon her.

Zagan knelt down in front of Stella.

“Stella, can you tell who I am?”

“Za...gan...”

Her eyes were still hollow, but she certainly did say his name nonetheless.

“Then do you know about Marc? That guy who hung out with us when we were brats.”

“Ma...rc..”

Stella pinned down her head in pain.

Even Nephys’s mysticism can’t repair the heart...

Zagan had no way of saving Stella as he was now. And with his gaze still fixed on the pitiful girl, he addressed Andrealphus once more.

“Andrealphus. Are you able to save her?”

“I don’t know if you’ll even believe me, but I took her as my disciple for precisely that reason.”

“...Got it. Come on Stella. Try standing.”

Zagan stood her up, then brought her before Andrealphus.

“Take care of her.”

“I promise I will.”

It wasn't clear if Stella could even tell where she was at the moment. Just as he let go of her hand, for some reason, she came to a complete stop.

“...? What's wrong?”

Zagan cocked his head to the side, as Stella once more grasped his hand. And then, she slowly spoke as if searching for the right words one at a time.

“So...rry... Zagan... I said... something... cruel... to you...”

And that finally lined up the scene in Zagan's memories. It was some time ago, when the girl that Zagan had saved disparaged him. If the bandit Zagan killed at the time was Decarabia, then just who was the girl that was there at the time?

Zagan let out a sigh.

“...Huh? So that was you? You were so pretty that I didn't realize it.”

The Stella in Zagan's memories was always covered in dirt. In contrast, the girl who was assaulted at the time was dressed up beautifully and looked like nothing but some noble princess. They were so different that he never figured they were the same person.

No... maybe I really did realize it already.

It may have been that he just never wanted to think about the girl he thought of as an older sister rejecting him like that. Ever since that incident, Zagan had stopped thinking of Marc and Stella to an unnatural degree, after all.

Stella continued to plead to him with tears falling down her face.

“I wanted... to thank... you... I had... to... but...”

Zagan had no idea what Stella's perception of him was at the time. But if by some chance, she did realize who he was, and he had just stolen the life of her family like he was just a bug...

She may have been the one who was more hurt than me...

Zagan gently hugged the crying girl like it couldn't be helped.

“I get it, don't cry. I'm quite happy just knowing you're still alive.” With that, he rubbed her forehead. “...Go already. Also... if possible... don't get involved with sorcery. Be happy. That's my wish.”

He wasn't sure whether his words got through to her, but it felt like Stella nodded, if only ever so slightly. And after separating from him, both she and Andrealphus vanished completely.

I should have apologized too...

But even so, he wouldn't apologize for killing the sorcerer known as a Decarabia. If he were to apologize over such a thing, Zagan would have to spend the rest of his life continuously apologizing. That was

one reason, but he also felt like stealing Stella's one reason for resenting him away would be far too cruel.

After confirming that Andrealphus' presence was completely gone, Zagan let out a forced sigh.

"My goodness. This turned out to be quite the vacation."

"Um... Master Zagan... Can I ask you something? Who... um... was that just now...?"

Nephy questioned him timidly with anxiety in her voice, to which Zagan replied with a slightly worn out smile on his face.

"Family. From before I was a sorcerer. But that's all."

He had completely forgotten about it until now, had never even tried to remember. Having it weigh on his mind now after all this time was surely far too convenient for him. That's why Zagan held his hand out to Nephy.

"Shall we go back?"

Right now, he already had a family. There was no value in digging up the pains of his past.

"I also want to go back to the castle already," Foll added.

"Is your hunger alright now?"

"I've had enough of this weird diet. I want Raphael's food."

Well, looks like she got enough mana from these snacks, so it should be fine.

Zagan pet Foll's head.

"Then let's go home. Back to our castle."

No matter how much he dug up the past, that was his home.



A girl stood still in a windy, grass covered plain. In her hand was a single white flower that she had plucked from somewhere or other. And sitting on the horizon were a great number of swords sticking out of the ground. They were grave markers.

One could tell that these were the graves of Angelic Knights who had fought here. They hadn't been there very long, yet not a single one of them was pristine and undamaged.

It gave a glimpse to just how fierce the fighting here was. The girl walked through the grave markers before coming to a stop at a certain spot. What stood there wasn't a sword, but a grave marker made of a wooden cross. It was simple, but nevertheless, it could be seen that the one buried here was treated with more courtesy than the others.

However, there wasn't a single blade of grass around it. The girl listlessly looked over the grave marker, and before long, she opened her mouth with a whisper.

"It has been a long time, my dear brother."

Just how long had it been since they'd met like this? One of them

was forever asleep, and these siblings would never again have the chance to exchange words.

“You have changed quite a lot haven’t you, brother...? Or perhaps, you haven’t changed at all.”

Behind her words was a helpless tone. And as if to punish him, she flicked the grave marker.

“...I met those children. They’re just like we were, truly, they are.”

She closed her eyes, and recalled them as if it were just yesterday. That person was there, and so was another, there was her brother, and a girl. They were happy days. But also, a broken memory. The Wise Dragon fell, and the Eldest passed. These were memories that only remained within this girl. And yet, they were memories she couldn’t allow to be forgotten.

“Those children have also begun chasing after Azazel.”

The girl put her hands to her chest as if to pray. As if to wish that they do not arrive at the answer.

If they do, they’ll meet the same fate as me.

And after praying, the girl let out a small sigh and laughed.

“Oh my, now that I think of it, just who does the Night Clan pray to? Alas! How comical.”

She then gave a red kiss to the flower in her hand, and placed it at the grave.

“No matter how much I long for it, I cannot go to that side. All I can do is disappear from this world. But...”

I survived.

It was a comical word for the undead to use. Nevertheless, her golden eyes were certainly filled with determination.

“Yes, I understand. I do not know how much time is left for me, but I will show you that I can protect them.”

The girl pinned down the sides of her chest. Just that portion of her black dress had gotten wet. Even though blood should not have been flowing through her body, it was as if her life was spilling away. However, that pain was proof that she was here in this world.

“I am here. I am here, Azazel!”

So please, please ignore those children.

Her lamenting prayer reached none, and vanished in the wind.

Afterword

Long time no see. I've come to bring you 'An Archdemon's Dilemma: How to Love Your Elf Bride' volume 7. My name is Fuminori Teshima.

The beach! Swimsuits! Yukata! Is it not the very essence of love power to betray one's teacher and come running over? Granny Gremory is truly beginning a battle with her life at stake. Yet what is it that awaits her at the beach in a foreign country?

Anyway, that's how our summer arc (though it's set in winter) starts up.

This time around, we've got an old man who's our first new Archangel in a while, and a bit of a punk sorcerer whose delusions have gone a bit too far. How stuffy. But we've got everyone in swimsuits and yukata, so it paints a nice and pretty picture anyway. Please do not worry. Also, you can't smoke until you're over 20, okay?

Last time, the story was a bit serious, so... I guess, maybe it wasn't this time? I tried to have everyone get really into the summer event. And when it comes to summer events, we start with endless worrying over a trivial encounter! Actually, this is the first time those two are being put front and center like that.

At any rate, we had Granny Gremory going wild all she wanted throughout the whole volume, so the words were practically spilling out of me as I wrote. Even I was quite surprised. My editor was telling me, "Even if you write it that fast, we can't do nothing with it, ya know!?" as he gave me a bitter smile."

Having said that, it seems this series will go on for quite a while, so we had a few important meetings to get things setup and put in some foreshadowing for upcoming volumes. Though, rather than setting things up, it was more like flipping over hidden pieces of paper from a while ago.

Even the new character who got named here was someone who was talked about back in volumes 1 and 2. But, when I do foreshadowing without being able to really reveal anything, it gets quite difficult because things have to be left so vague.

Thanks to all that, we had to rush out the character design for someone seeing that the manga adaptation was hitting one of those foreshadowing scenes, so I had to trouble COMTA and Itagaki to work things out together. But thanks to their work, I think that the manga

has a great setup for volume 7 now.

So please take a look at Elf Bride's manga version too, courtesy of Comic Fire and NicoNico Seiga! (Sudden advertisement!)

Now then, back to the story. We were hoping to put a grin on people who recognized the foreshadowing. I was planning to stop if my editor yelled at me, but we kind of just went along with it without telling anyone. None of it really means anything to a brand new reader, so it's just there to please my fans.

Phew, I guess that's about it. It's been a while since I've had so many pages for an afterword, so I got to talk about the content more than usual.

As for my current status as an author... Well, there's nothing particularly important to report. We can't really go out and announce things just because a manuscript for something is done in this business. So if you look at it from the outside, I might just look like a NEET fiddling with plastic model kits...

Oh, speaking of plastic models, I got an honorable mention in a contest the other day! I made my modeller debut with a rookie of the year award! I seem to be linked by fate to honorable mentions... But I am doing my job too, okay?

As for the next volume, well, if everything goes well, it should come out next spring. Maybe I'll be able to announce something more interesting in that one.

Now then, let's get to thanking everyone.

To the one I'm always so deeply obliged to, K. To the illustrator COMTA, who I burdened with all these new clothing designs for swimsuits and yukata (Everything was fantastic! Even the draft!). To the mangaka Hako Itagaki, whose updates I look forward to so very much. To the chief editor at Comic Fire. To everyone who took part in the cover design, proofreading, publicity, and such. To Kirio and Rikka, who invited me out to an event. To my children, who go shopping with me even now. And to you, my dear readers, who are holding this book in your hands.

Thank you very much!

Next time! Zagan is hunting for clues on his old friend Marc. But as a shut-in, he has no idea that a special date for couples is approaching... Christmas!

November 2018: On an evening where I dragged out the kotatsu
— Fuminori Teshima

Bonus Short Stories

A Size too Big

“Come now, little lady. Put this on.”

Due to certain circumstances, Foll ended up growing to about Zagan’s normal size. And since she was no longer able to wear her usual clothing, she wound up borrowing clothes from Gremory.

“Thanks. Your clothes look all frilly and fun. I wanted to try them on.”

Even though her body was bigger, Foll was still the same as usual on the inside, so she was holding up Gremory’s clothes in amusement.

“Hnngh, the little lady is playing with my clothes. What beautiful love power! But we must hurry. If Lady Nephy finds us, it’ll all be over.”

“Mm. Nephy’s scary when she’s angry. I’ll change right away.”

Foll began tossing off her torn clothes in a hurry and picked up Gremory’s outfit.

“Gremory. I don’t know how to put this bra on.”

“What!? Uh... so it’s fine if I’m the one who teaches you, right? Won’t Lady Nephy get mad? No, wait, we don’t have time. This is just an act of god! We have no other choice!”

Gremory began huffing from her nose as she took her bra in hand.

“Gremory. That’s embarrassing. Do it properly.”

“Okay... Um, first, slouch over. Yes, like that. Next, line up with the cups. Now, if you just fasten the latch on the back... Th-The latch on the...”

WH-WHAT...!? It won’t reach?! Is this girl bigger than me? To think that such an innocent little girl would surpass even me... What love power!

There was no way the bra would fit with her current size, so Gremory put her sorcery to use to somehow succeed at getting the bra to latch in place.

“Gremory. It’s too tight.”

“Grrrr... I’ll look for something that fits better later, so put up with it for now.”

“Okay. Oh...”

The bra wasn’t able to bear her mass, and the latch on her back pitifully broke apart.

“Gah! I’ll tie it together with string! That way, it’ll hold for at least a few hours. Anyway, get changed quickly, little lady!”

Foll picked up some more clothes after being urged on by Gremory, but for some reason, she suddenly pressed her face into them.

“...Smells like Gremory.”

“Hnngh! Lady Foll... can you put on the rest yourself? That was... wonderful love power...”

Gremory sank away into a sea of her own blood.

Later on, Nephy gave them a terrible scolding, but for now, she was happy.

Snow and the Beach

“Hey, Miss Nephteros! This is, like, super tasty! You should totally have some!”

The one on the sandy beach of the uninhabited island with a huge smile plastered on their face was the siren Selphy. Even though Nephteros looked annoyed, she took the bowl into her hands.

“What is this? Noodles...? Or not. Did you put syrup on snow or something?”

The bowl had what looked like a mound of snow in it with a red sauce poured over it. Seeing Nephteros look at it like a completely mysterious object, Selphy’s eyes shot open in surprise.

“It’s shaved ice. You’ve never had any?”

“I’ve never even seen anything like this before... You can eat it?”

“Of course! I made it for you to eat!”

Nephteros picked up the spoon and scooped some up easily. And as she brought it to her mouth...

“C-Cold!”

It was also sweet. And yet, it melted away the moment it went in her mouth. The tips of Nephteros’ ears instinctively quivered at the piercing cold feeling accompanied by the rich sweetness, leading Selphy to put on a broad grin.

“Eheheh. Guess you like it, huh?”

“...Is it that fun to look at my face?”

“Well, yeah? It, like, makes me happy to watch someone enjoy something I made, okay? Your face is totally telling me it’s super tasty.”

“Am I really making that sort of expression?”

Nephteros herself intended to maintain her usual composure.

“It’s delicious... Is snow also this soft and sweet, I wonder?”

“Nope. If you don’t put any syrup on, it’s got no taste all.”

“So you’ve tried...” Nephteros replied in shock, which made Selphy tilt her head to the side.

“Huh? Hey, Miss Nephteros, have you never seen snow before? A

lot of people try when they first see it...”

“I haven’t ever had the chance to. Well, it’s not impossible to make some with sorcery, but...”

“It’s not any fun to just make it with sorcery. Oh, I know! Why don’t we, like, watch it snow together the next time it happens! It should be winter by the time we get back to the castle, so we should have the time.”

Unable to beat Selphy’s carefree smile, Nephteros simply accepted the bait and smiled back.

“You’re right. So, next time it snows, let’s enjoy ourselves.”

“Yaaay! This is the first time you said you’d play with me!”

“I didn’t say anything about playing... W-Well, whatever.”

And so, Nephteros continued eating her shaved ice as the sun beat down on her.



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by Fuminori Teshima

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Edited by DxS

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